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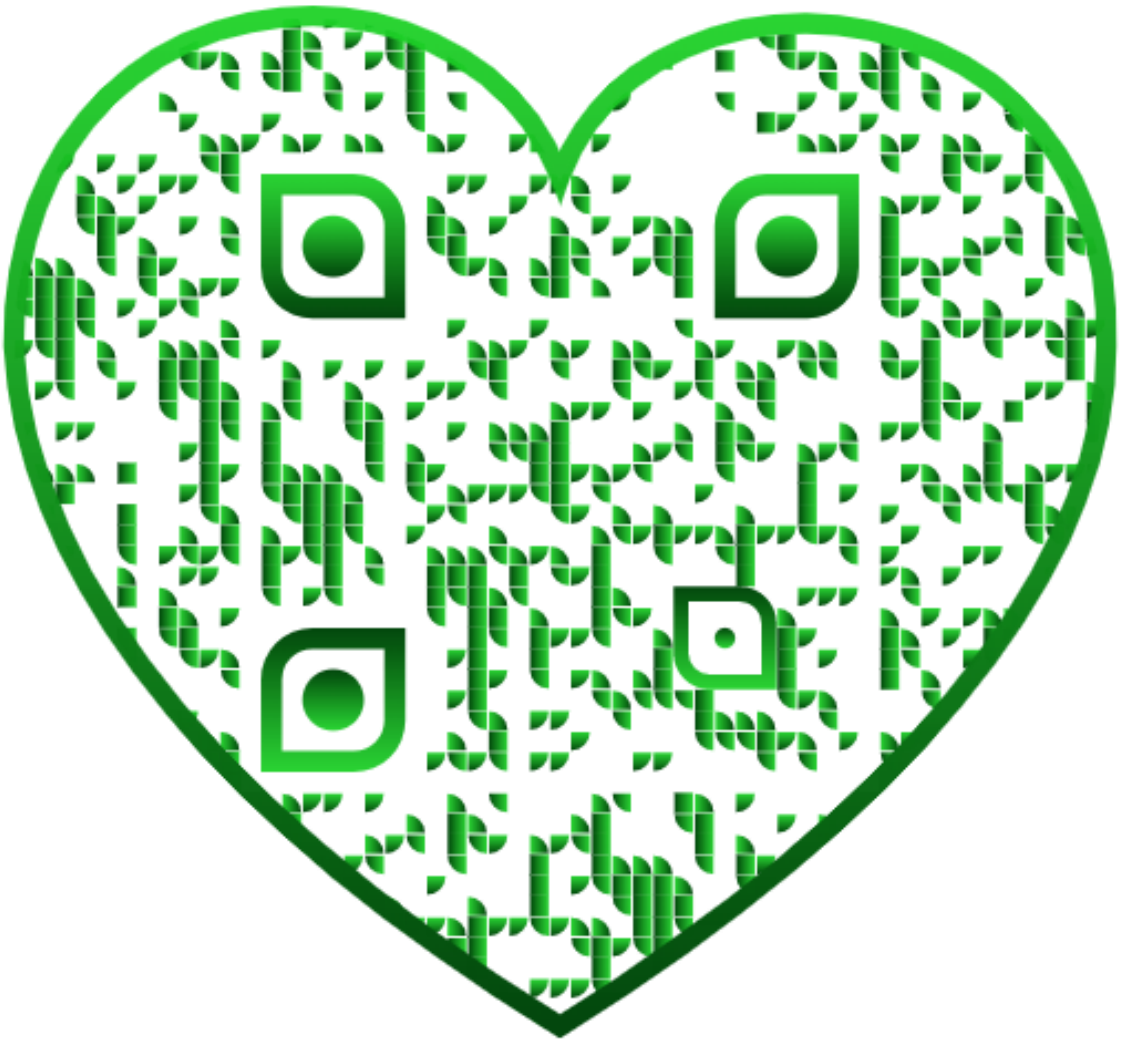

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CHIMES OF FREEDOM

IN 1982, I was a student at the University of Michigan and working at the Campus Broadcasting Network, which housed the school's AM and FM radio stations. It was a great place for a young musician to volunteer, not the least because it exposed one to so much new music, often several weeks before it saw commercial release. Which is how, one summer day that year, I came to hear the rapidly arpeggiating riffs of Peter Buck's Rickenbacker 360 on R.E.M.'s "Wolves, Lower" from their debut EP, *Chronic Town*. I was mesmerized, not simply because it's such a great riff but also because of the fleetness of its execution. "Is that the right speed?" someone in the studio asked, wondering if the DJ had accidentally set the turntable to 45 rpm. Yeah, it was. For the record, for the time, and certainly for me.

About a year later, in autumn of '83, I was dating a girl who worked for one of Ann Arbor's local music promoters. She had the latest music releases before anyone else. One day, she placed a record on her turntable. "Heard this yet?" she asked, dropping the needle. In a moment, I was treated to the plangent chime of Johnny Marr's Rickenbacker (tracked alongside an early '50s Fender Telecaster, as we now know) as it kicked off the Smiths' second single, "This Charming Man." Hooked again.

I think what grabbed me so about Buck and Marr was each man's talent for melody. Until then, I was accustomed to hearing guitar as a rhythm, riff and solo instrument, but both of these guys approached their music as if they were the lead player on an instrumental record. Yes, their filigree had to weave along with Michael Stipe's and Morrissey's vocals. But — and I say this as a fan of both groups and their lead singers — you could have removed the singing from a lot of those songs and still had a kick-ass record, so beautifully compelling were the melodies that Buck and Marr crafted. There was nothing like it at the time, but soon there was plenty more worth hearing, as the underground rose and the alternative rock genre took off on both sides of the Atlantic, thanks to the success of R.E.M. and the Smiths.

The memory of those days 40 years ago was partly what inspired this issue's exploration of alternative rock guitar. Like most genres, it has its precursors and many factions that spun off as the format splintered and evolved. We've tried to explore the main arteries and the players who kept the music pulsing along, and our effort here is by no means exhaustive. But, notably, we were lucky to score an interview with a guitarist at the forefront of the current alt-rock scene, Courtney Barnett. Her new album, *Things Take Time, Take Time*, is bringing her well-deserved attention and acclaim, and I encourage you to check it out.

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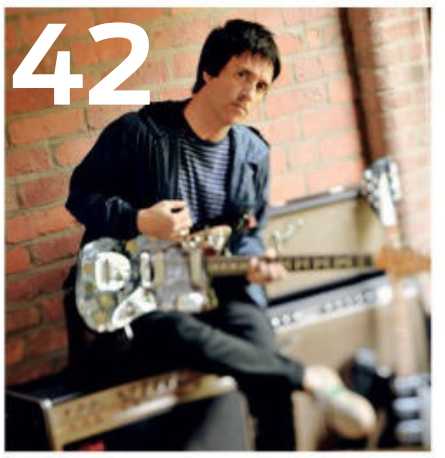

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ALTERNATIVE NOTION

AVA puts an elegant spin on carbon-fiber luthiery with its One First Edition electric guitars.

BY DAVE HUNTER

FROM MARIO MACCAFERRI'S injection-molded plastic guitars of the 1950s to Dan Armstrong's late-'60s Lucite guitars and basses, and Gibson's 1980 Sonex line, the use of alternative materials in cutting-edge luthiery is nothing new. While none of those adventures stayed the course, however, AVA's high-end guitars made from advanced carbon fiber aim to turn the page on the industry's use of endangered materials.

It might be antithetical to say carbon fiber has long been the material of the future, but that seemingly contradictory status abides in the guitar world. While the stuff has been accepted for use in everything from racing bikes to wind-turbine blades to aerospace applications, it has yet to replace traditional woods in the hearts and minds of guitarists, despite the previous and ongoing efforts of adventurous makers such as McPherson, Kevin Michael, Klos, Rainsong, Gus and a few others. Founded in 2011 in Porto, Portugal, with the express purpose of building elegant, forward-looking instruments, AVA Guitars determined that carbon-fiber construction was the way to go, and the results indicate they're onto something.

The two examples of AVA's One First Edition models featured here come to *GP* fresh from their appearance on the Boutique Guitar Showcase Tour 2021. Carrying First Edition plates numbered 21 and 22 of 100, they beautifully exhibit the company's efforts to render this 21st century material into clean, elegant, subtly eclectic guitars. How do they do it?

"AVA guitars are the result of more than a decade of research, design, development and testing with engineers and guitar players to achieve and iterate the correct behavior of carbon fiber," AVA CEO Júlio Martins explains. "Composite materials have a very close resemblance to wood. Both are composed of fibers — cellulose versus carbon fiber — adequately placed into a matrix, in this case a resin. So a very similar approach regarding the orientations of the fibers may be used to mimic the behavior of wood.

"We don't have any issues with wood," he adds. "We just want to show that it can be done differently, with soul and sound. And now we can say that carbon-fiber composite is an adequate alternative, regardless of the good historical use of wood, and a great material for musical instruments."

Obviously, the build process involves careful calculation to maximize both strength and resonance. "The optimization comes mainly from the type of fibers and the placement and layering of these fibers around the guitar elements — the body, soundboard, neck and headstock," Martins says. "We used computer-aided simulation

PHOTOS COURTESY OF AVA GUITARS

and measurements to help us and to ensure that the right behavior and frequencies were being reproduced."

As straightforward as the model appears at first glance — intentionally so, Martins says, to aid familiarity — an in-hand inspection reveals the application of a keen eye for design at every angle and curve. The basic single-cutaway, dual-humbucker format might imply "Les Paul alternative," but the details are far more modernist than any strict adherence to that archetype might allow, with something of a Scandinavian-meets–midcentury-modern aesthetic playing out across the form as a whole. The body is much thinner, for one thing, and sculpted so that the inside of the cutaway, neck heel and sides flow smoothly into a gently radiused back, while the top sports a very slight arch from the sharp edges to the center. Between the shallow body dimensions and the largely hollow-bodied carbon-fiber shell, both guitars come in very light, too, at just a tick

The salmon-pink example features Lollar Charlie Christian blade pickups, while the carbon-finished model has open-coil Seymour Duncan Seth Lover humbuckers.

over six pounds, and each includes a custom white AVA flight case.

The neck and body are formed as an integral unit to a scale length of 25.4 inches. The Richlite Black Diamond fingerboard has 22 medium-jumbo Jescar frets with a Tusq nut, beyond which is a tapered, minimalist headstock with a truss-rod access cover and Schaller M6 tuners. The neck is molded to a medium-C shape that feels nicely rounded in the palm. A width of 1.71 inches at the nut and a flat-leaning 16-inch fingerboard radius yield lots of playing room across the board (which, arguably, might feel a little broad to smaller hands), and the neck is smooth, fast and easy.

The cosmetic details also deliver more than might appear at first glance. The humbucker-equipped example's nearly black top is the result of AVA's intention to leave the fibers visible. This reveals the unidirectional carbon fiber, in which the fibers are placed in a single direction, rather than the more common woven pattern seen in the control cavity cover. It all contrasts dramatically with the bright white of the back and neck. The salmon-pink guitar, which is the same color front and back (with a narrow black binding to separate the two) presents a nicely textured feel from its matte-acrylic finish, with a smoother neck back for easy playing.

Both guitars carry Schaller hardware throughout, including Tune-o-matic-inspired roller-saddle bridges and stop-bar tailpieces — black hardware on the salmon-pink guitar, and an elegant bronzed plating on the black-and-white. The latter carries a pair of Seymour Duncan Seth Lover humbuckers installed open-coil, with thin filets of carbon fiber atop the coils. The salmon-pink example has humbucker-sized Lollar Charlie Christian blade pickups. Both sets do their thing through a custom circuit board beneath the arty control plates, with three-way toggle selector and master volume and tone controls. One could argue that these AVAs might benefit from more modernist component selection, and there's a great variety of stylish and creative parts out there even off the shelf. On the other hand, the traditional bridge, tailpiece, tuner and pickup designs might also help these otherwise overtly alternative guitars cross over to more conservative players.

The exposed top reveals the unidirectional carbon fiber, which contrasts with the woven carbon fiber of the control panel.

Played unplugged, both guitars exhibit good acoustic volume and impressive sustain. Their sonic foundation is upper-midrange forward, with a little more "snap" than you might expect to hear from a traditional set-neck solid or semi-solid electric. But different types of guitars can sound so extremely different when played un-amped as it is, and I wouldn't venture to say these sound dramatically different from anything else because of their alternative materials.

Plugged into a Friedman Small Box head with a 2x12 cab and a Carr Super Bee 1x10 combo, the full character of these instruments roars. The overall tone of each is more balanced, clear, dynamic and expressive than overtly "modern," especially when you close your eyes and simply play them.

Many players' preconceptions of guitars made from alternative modern materials is that they'll sound cold, sterile and clinical, yet both AVA examples are anything but. There's a subtly gutteral richness at the heart of the tone that seems to be a combination of the instruments' lively acoustic resonance and the pickups doing their thing. This lends a little grind even to cleaner settings when you dig in, but it also cleans up remarkably well through a winding-down of the volume control via the custom electronics.

In this way and others, the humbucker-loaded, black-and-white AVA is somewhat aligned with a good semi-acoustic ES-335 and the like, with that ever-so-slightly raspy vibrational edge leading the fuller body and richness that underpins its sonic personality. As such, there's plenty of bite and sting

without ever being harsh or strident. And while there's decent thickness to the overall voice, too, it's perhaps more in the SG camp (or again, the ES) than the Les Paul camp.

The salmon AVA is a little more individualistic, its Lollar blade pickups giving it a trenchant, slightly raw voice that one might call part P-90, part gold-foil, and one that's very inspiring at that. It's great for anything from dirty country blues to rootsy snarl to heavier indie and garage-rock styles, and it proved extremely appealing into a variety of amp settings and pedals.

"WE DON'T HAVE ANY ISSUES WITH WOOD. WE JUST WANT TO SHOW IT CAN BE DONE DIFFERENTLY, WITH SOUL AND SOUND"

All in all, the AVA One First Edition is a great option for guitarists looking to break the bounds of conventional construction and find creatively expressive new voices in the process, without tipping over into instruments that look or sound overtly experimental or otherworldly. The Portuguese maker clearly has something going here, and we're excited to see where they take it next.

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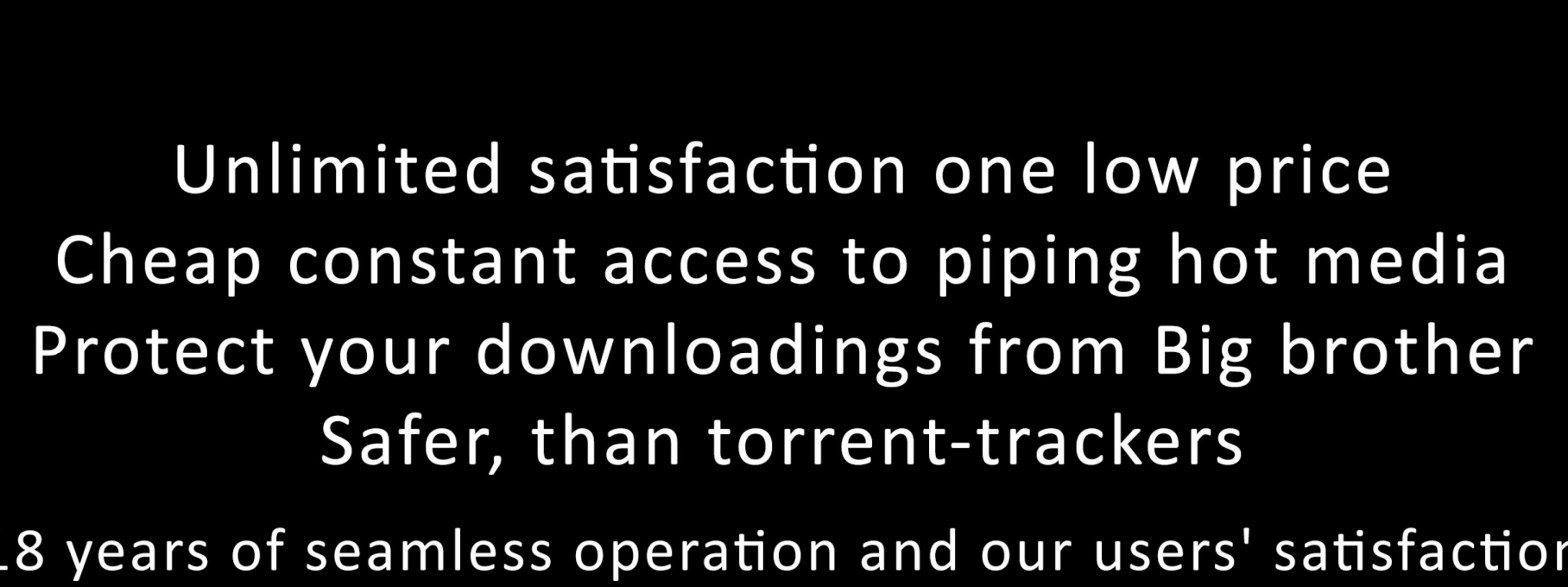

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DEEP CUTS

Joanne Shaw Taylor digs up rare and forgotten gems from the classic era on *The Blues Album*.

BY JOE BOSSO

BRITISH BLUES GUITARIST Joanne Shaw Taylor's new record is called *The Blues Album* (KTBA Records), which might cause her fans to scratch their heads a bit: Weren't her seven previous releases blues albums? "They were, but in a way they were not," Taylor says. "When I think of the blues, I think of Howlin' Wolf and Muddy Waters, and my own music has strayed a bit from that kind of thing, especially songs that I write. So when I decided to do a covers album, I went for things that were more traditional, and the album title just seemed appropriate."

Taylor's choices for covers might be more in the straight-up blues lane, but she didn't opt for tried-and-true selections. The 11 sparkling cuts include mostly rare gems by the likes of Albert King, Little Richard, Magic Sam, Aretha Franklin, Little Richard and Peter Green–era Fleetwood Mac, among others. Throughout the record, Taylor's fiery and spunky guitar playing sparkles, but the real revelation here is the power of her dramatic and supple singing.

"That was something I really wanted to concentrate on," she says. "We tend to place so much emphasis on guitar playing with the blues, but look at B.B. and Freddie King. They were incredible singers. My voice was pretty rested from time off the road because of Covid, so I thought, 'Now's the time to show people I can sing.'"

"ONE GUY WAS FURIOUS I DIDN'T SOUND LIKE ZZ TOP. IF THAT'S WHAT YOU WANT, GO LISTEN TO ZZ TOP"

To pull it off, Taylor turned to a good friend who knows a thing or two about both guitar playing and singing: Joe Bonamassa, who co-produced the album at Nashville's Ocean Way Studios with session ace Josh Smith. Bonamassa duets with Taylor on a shining cover of Little Village's "Don't Go Away Mad," and both he and Smith contribute guitar parts on the remaining tracks. Other musicians include keyboardist Reese Wynans, drummer Greg Morrow, bassist Steve Mackey, and horn players Steve Patrick, Mark Douthit and Barry Green.

"Working with Joe and Josh was incredible," Taylor enthuses. "Joe and I have known each other a long time, but this was our first time doing a record together. We spent a couple of days at his house going over songs, just so I could figure out the keys, but there was nothing that didn't work. We didn't do demos. Once we had the songs all picked out, we were both like, 'Okay, we're going in.'"

During lockdown, you obviously had a lot more time to work on this record than you might normally.
I did. Usually, I'm given a week off and it's, Okay, go make an album. To be honest, that kind of helps me, because I've learned that I work best under pressure. It motivates me. So does fear of failure, which in a way was another reason for doing a covers album, because I just couldn't come up with any original material. I was sitting at home every day and had nothing to write about. I wasn't out on the road, and I wasn't having any affairs or having my heart broken. I was just sitting at home reading the news every day.

One could speculate that would give you a lot of material for the blues.
I know, right? [*laughs*] But I'll tell you, having lived through everything in America last summer and everything that's going on with Brexit, I've had enough of that. I didn't want to put it into music and have to sing it every night. I'm over it. I wanted an escape from all that stuff with a bunch of great songs that I've always loved.

GUS STEWART/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

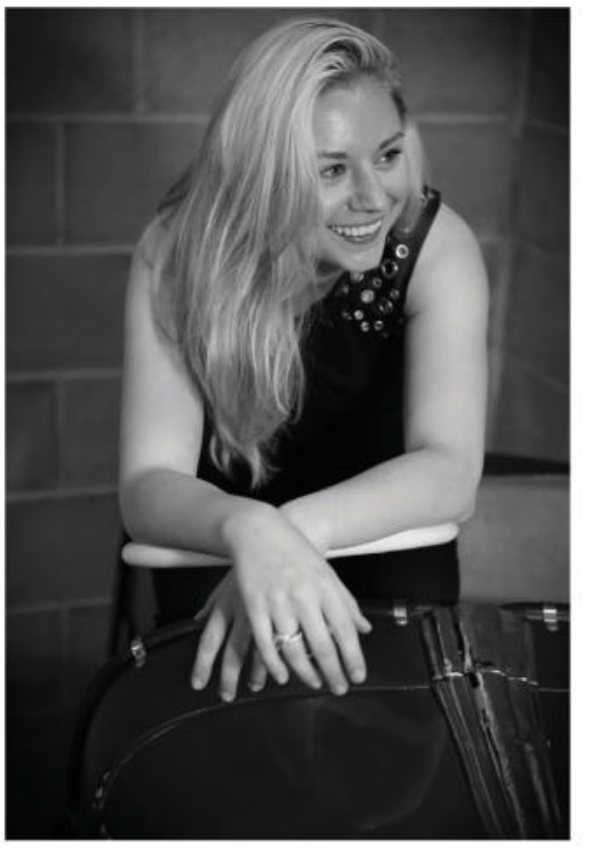
Did lockdown afford you more time to practice the guitar?
It did, but for the first few weeks or so being home, I didn't even touch the guitar. I needed a break. But when I got back to it, it was fun to really enjoy it again. I put on B.B. King DVDs and jammed along. That was some great practice for me.

How did you and Joe go about picking the songs to record?
It was kind of half and half. I had about five songs that I was adamant about doing, like the Little Richard ballad "I Don't Know What You Got (But It's Got Me)." There were a couple of songs I used to perform when I was 14, like Albert King's "Can't You See What You're Doing to Me." I wanted to go back and re-address that now that I don't sing like a schoolgirl.

Joe picked the rest of the album, but the two of us were insistent that they wouldn't be obvious covers. No "Sweet Home Chicago" and "Smokestack Lightning." We wanted to do our own thing, and we also wanted to do songs that pushed me as a vocalist.

Which these songs do. However, when it comes to guitar playing, were you worried about tackling "Stop Messin' Round" and facing comparisons to Peter Green?
I probably should have been. That would have been smart. But the whole point of this record was that I wasn't worried about how it would go down. I did that song because I love it. If people want to nitpick and compare my tone to Peter Green's, that's up to them. I had one guy email me about my last album. He was furious that I didn't sound more like ZZ Top. He would email me every day about it. And it's like, "Dude, really? If that's what you want, then go and listen to ZZ Top."

Joe Bonamassa played rhythm guitar on the album. What kind of relationship do you have as players?
Probably not much of one. We've always kept our sort of personal relationship separate from work. I haven't actually played with him a great deal. I could have played rhythm on the album, but why do that when I have a more than capable guitarist right there? He played the first solo on "Don't Go Away Mad," and I played the second one. I think we complemented each other really well. We're both inside the blues scale and the minor pentatonic, but I think our influences are quite obviously different. I'm from Britain and grew up worshipping the Texas guys, and he's from America and grew up worshipping the British guys.



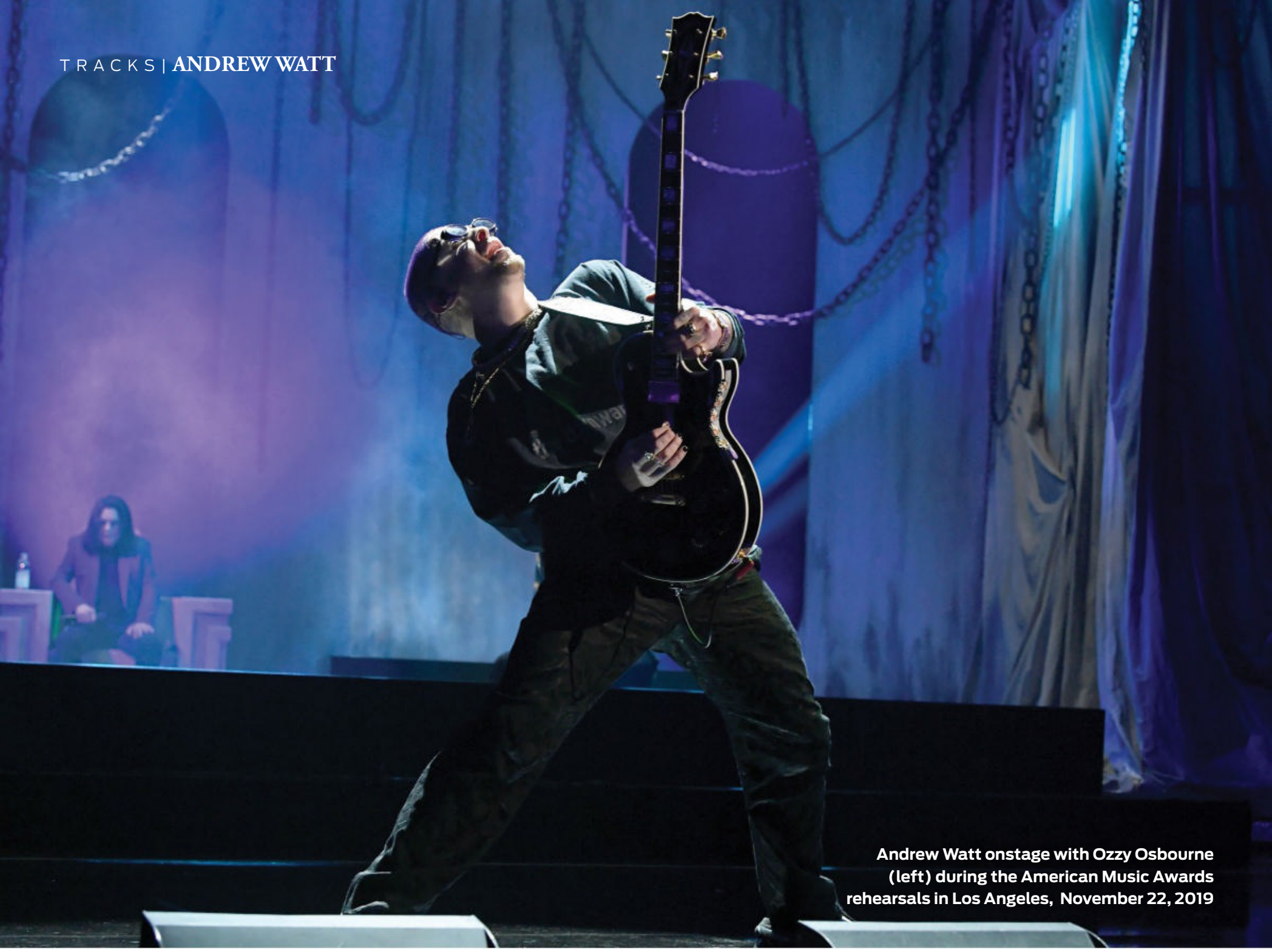
Which guitars did you use on the record? Did you play any of Joe's 3,000 guitars?
Which I think is an accurate number. [*laughs*] He was really annoyed with me because I only packed my main guitar, Junior, which is a '66 Fender Esquire. Joe had his whole arsenal, and he hand-selected some Teles for me to play. What I didn't realize was that he plays really heavy-gauge strings — .011s — and he has really high action. I tried to play them, but I just couldn't. So I just used my Esquire, although I did use a couple of his amps: a Howard Dumble Overdrive Special and a '62 Fender Deluxe.

Funny thing was, Joe started to play my Esquire. I would take it to his house each night, and the more he played it, the more he got attached to it. I realized it was time for me to leave and take Junior with me. I didn't want a bidding war to break out.

RECOMMENDED LISTENING

The Blues Album

"Stop Messin' Round,"
"Can't You See What You're Doing To Me,"
"Don't Go Away Mad,"
"Let Me Down Easy,"
"If That Ain't a Reason"



Andrew Watt onstage with Ozzy Osbourne (left) during the American Music Awards rehearsals in Los Angeles, November 22, 2019

KEVIN WINTER/AMA2019/GETTY IMAGES FOR DCP

MY CAREER IN FIVE SONGS

Andrew Watt picks the tracks that have defined his role as guitarist and producer to stars old and new.

BY RICHARD BIENSTOCK

ROCK FANS MAY have first heard the name Andrew Watt when he was announced as the guitarist, songwriter and producer behind Ozzy Osbourne's most recent studio album, 2020's *Ordinary Man*. But the 31-year-old phenom has been a major player in the music world for years before he connected with Ozz. Although he cut his teeth as a rock guitarist, both as a solo artist and playing alongside Glenn Hughes and Jason Bonham in the short-lived supergroup California Breed, Watt has also been responsible for some of pop's biggest smashes from the likes of Post Malone, Shawn Mendes, Camila Cabello, Justin Bieber, 5 Seconds of Summer and others. For *Ordinary Man*, he assembled a supergroup that included Guns N' Roses bassist Duff McKagan and Red Hot Chili Peppers drummer Chad Smith

But no matter what artist he's working alongside, Watt says the creative process always begins the same way for him. "I write every song sitting on a couch with a guitar or jamming with other musicians," he explains. "From there you can add all the current-sounding drums and synths you want, or you can play with Duff and Chad and make it an absolute rock-metal heater. It's all in the production. I haven't changed my process in how my art and my music comes to me. I do it the same way I did it when I was 11 years old."

What has changed, he continues, are his collaborators. "I'm constantly finding new people to work with who take how I play guitar and other instruments and put it all together in a new way and add a different kind of flair," Watt says. "For me, collaboration is key to evolution. And if you don't evolve, you're stuck."

Here, Watt takes us through five of his greatest collaborations.

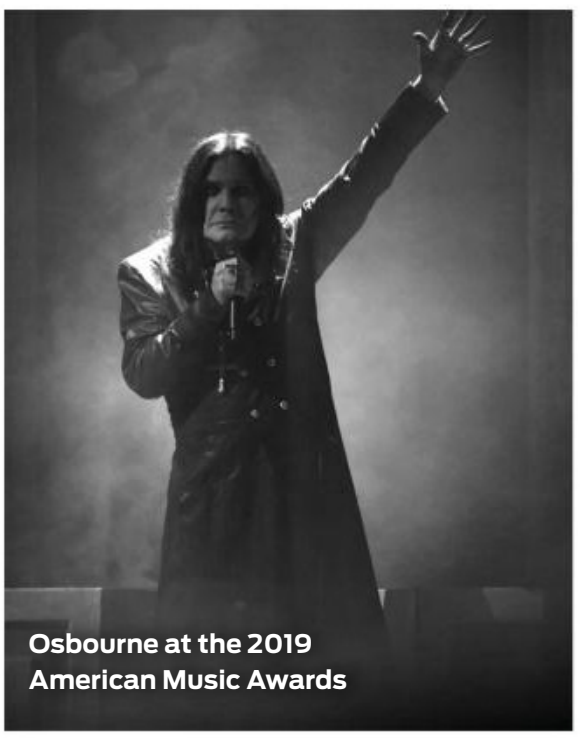
Watt onstage with Post Malone at Coachella, Palm Springs, April 17, 2016

"STAY"
POST MALONE, *BEERBONGS & BENTLEYS* (2018)

"Post and I had just started our friendship and we wanted to make music together. This was 2015 or 2016. I was working at Henson Studios [*in L.A.*] at the time, so I told him, 'Come through whenever you want to come through.' He came through one night, and I remember he got really uncomfortable. I went outside with him. We were smoking cigarettes and he says, 'Man, this studio is too nice for me.' So we brought in couches, got a cooler with a hundred Bud Lights, lit up some cigarettes and gave it a vibe. This is the room where they recorded 'We Are the World.' But I figured I'd worry about the bill later.

"We started getting on a roll, and one of the songs we made was 'Stay.' One day we're sitting on the couch in that room. Post had an old Gibson Country Western and I had an old Martin 0-18. We were talking about how much we love George Harrison and started playing these Beatles-type chords — major sevens and things. Then Post went and laid down a bunch of scratch melodies in the vocal booth, we got a basic melody structure down, and he left. I was so inspired that I stayed overnight — as I was doing back then, because studio time was limited for me — and I tracked everything on the song. I put a bunch of electric guitars on, and for the bass, I was listening to [*David Bowie's*] 'Space Oddity' and trying to do something sparse and melodic and cool. And since we had been talking so much about George Harrison, I played a slide solo on a 1957 Gibson Ultratone lap steel through a Supro amp.

"Then Post came in the next day and he said, 'I got the lyrics.' And they were perfect. He laid it down, we collaborated on the background vocals, and that was the song. It's one of my favorite things I've ever done because it's one of the first records where an artist was just like, 'Go paint the canvas,' and let me do that. It's really special to me."



JEFF KRAVITZ/AMA2019/FILMMAGIC FOR DCP; KEVIN MAZUR (OZZY)/WIREIMAGE FOR UNIVERSAL MUSIC (MALONE)

Osbourne at the 2019 American Music Awards

"ALL MY LIFE"
OZZY OSBOURNE, *ORDINARY MAN* (2020)

"Chad, Duff and I did the main sessions for the Ozzy album in four days. This one probably came on day two. By that time we were pumping. We knew how to speak together, and we were working stuff out. And we were referencing the things we love about Ozzy. I was going through songs of his that I love and that the fans love, and 'Mama, I'm Coming Home' is one of those. I love the beautiful 12-string acoustic guitar and the way his voice sounds over that. And I love 'No More Tears,' how it's a heavy riff and a really simple one-liner. So I was thinking of those two songs as we were making this music.

"I start playing the opening melody, and Duff, being the beast that he is, comes in with this melodic bass line that's so Guns N' Roses. Then we get to the chorus and we needed a riff, so we collaborated on this riff until it felt really great.

"For the vocal, me and Ozzy and Ali Tamposi, who I write pretty much all my songs with, got together and came up with some melodies that felt really cool. Ali and Ozzy are both sober and they really bonded over that, and you can hear it in the lyrics. And recording Ozzy's vocal is the most fun thing in the world. He doubles his voice and nails it — puts all the emotion in.

"After we did all of that, I was listening to the song and thinking about how to approach the solo. I knew I wanted it to be melodic, like how the 'No More Tears' solo is so melodic. And I came up with the melody that you hear in the song. That was my theme. I was playing my Ronson Les Paul [*Watt owns an early 1970s Les Paul Standard that once belonged to guitarist Mick Ronson*], and the first time you hear the melody it kind of moves slow. Then it comes back for the second time and all hell breaks loose. Duff and Chad are ripping through the end of the song, and it was just so much fun to play over that."

"COLLABORATION IS KEY TO EVOLUTION. AND IF YOU DON'T EVOLVE, YOU'RE STUCK"

"SEÑORITA"
SHAWN MENDES AND CAMILA CABELLO, *SEÑORITA* (2019)

"This was a song I started with Ali Tamposi and Charlie XCX. I made the guitar riff first. I love covers of songs — I find inspiration in them all the time, because you can discover really cool things in those interpretations. And one of my favorite covers ever is José Feliciano's version of 'Light My Fire.' I just love the bossa nova feel and the way the guitar works in that version.

H.E.R. performs on *The Late Show With Stephen Colbert*, April 2, 2019

"I had recently made the song 'Havana' by Camila Cabello, and it was something a lot of people had really enjoyed, so I wanted to stay in that lane. I put some chords together and laid down a bass line on a Hofner. The song really lived with my Martin 0-18, a Hofner and a finger snap for a long time.

"We started writing the hook, and I played it for Shawn Mendes. He really loved it and became attached to it. We wrote more of the song together, and once Camila got involved, I got together with her and we wrote her verse. There are some songs where you capture lightning in a bottle, and then there are songs that are more of an evolution and a step process. This one was more of a step process. It was recorded all over the place — in London with Shawn, in L.A. with Camila. I worked on it in New York, in Miami. It was what had to happen to get it done.

"But it really stayed simple. Besides the addition of some drums and some 808s that are following that Hofner, it stayed in its original form, production-wise, which is great. What took it to the stratosphere was Shawn and Camila. It was a good song before that, but with the two of them together it became like a *West Side Story* kind of thing. They really made it their love story."

"THE LAY DOWN"
DRAM AND H.E.R. (2019)

"DRAM is an artist who sits in this unlabeled space. He's a full-blown tripper, an amazing character with an incredible voice. His biggest song is a hip-hop record called 'Broccoli,' but after meeting him it was so clear that's not all he is. He can do anything. He wanted to make music with me, so I said, 'Okay, let's do some experimental shit where it's like P-Funk and you're George Clinton and the world hasn't had music like that in a really long time. And your lyrical content and the way you deliver is going to be what's modern and fresh.' And then I said, 'Let's make it live.'

Shawn Mendes and Camila Cabello

"I pulled together Chad Smith on drums and Pino Palladino, who needs no introduction, on bass. And we got Ivan Neville to play keys, and we started making music. I grabbed my Ronson Les Paul and this three-minute solo came out of me. The band followed me, and you feel it building, and what you hear on the record is all live and in one take. I overdubbed some slide guitars and other things, but aside from that it's all what we did right then and there. Then I played the track for DRAM, and he wrote one of the most beautiful songs ever over it. And then H.E.R. jumped on it and she sang along with my guitar solo at the end, which sounds so Pink Floyd to me. The whole thing is psychedelic and funky and cool. It sounds like you're at a concert when you listen to it. It's live, and it's pumping and breathing."

"YOUNGBLOOD"
5 SECONDS OF SUMMER, *YOUNGBLOOD* (2018)

"I'm really into shuffles. One of my favorite artists is Stevie Wonder, and if you listen to 'Higher Ground' [*from* Innervisions], that shuffle he's doing with his foot — because he's playing the drums — is coming from the kick drum. I just love that stuff and that feel.

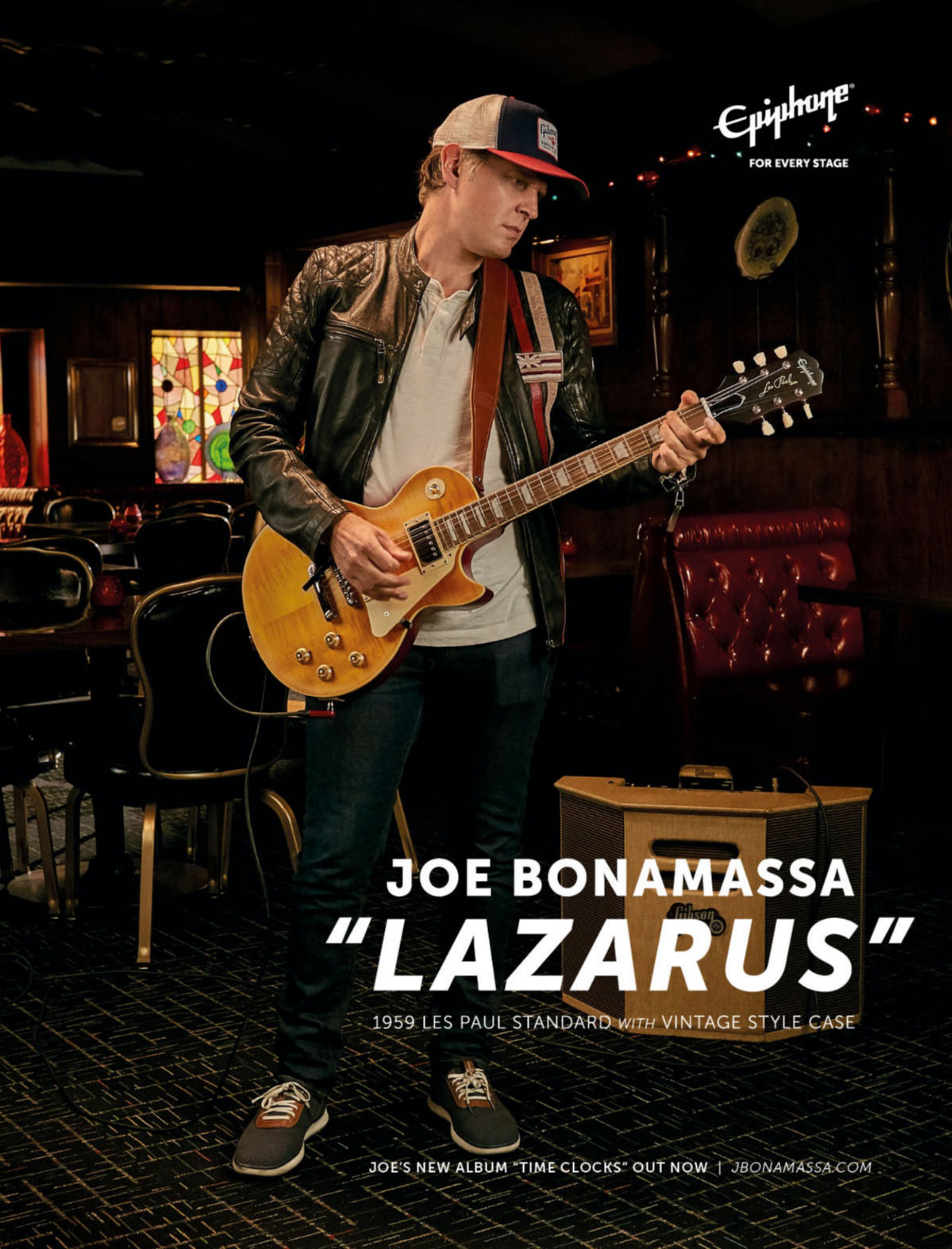
"I had started working with 5 Seconds of Summer, and a lot of people looked at them as a boy band, but they're not. They're all incredible musicians. They can all play every instrument. They love rock music. They can harmonize like skyrockets in flight. They just were making the wrong kind of music.

Michael Clifford (left) and Luke Hemmings of 5 Seconds of Summer

"So I started talking to them about different eras and different sounds of rock music. I told them, 'I want to make something with a shuffle.' We were messing around with these chords and the idea of this atmosphere building over electric guitar that eventually just explodes. That sounds like stadium rock to me. Ali and I got together with the boys, and I put down some chords with the kick drum doing that kind of shuffle pattern, and that became 'Youngblood.'

"I tried different guitar parts to link everything together, and I ended up with this kind of muted part that has an Andy Summers or a Tears for Fears vibe. It really clicked. Then I got together with [*producer*] Louis Bell, who helped me tighten everything up and bring it to a whole other level. It became the band's first number-one song. And then it was the most played song on the NFL that season! It's like the song 'Rock and Roll (Part 2).' Something about going *boom ba-boom ba-boom ba-boom* makes you want to throw a football, you know?"

JOHN SHEARER/AMA2019/GETTY IMAGES FOR DCP (MENDES & CABELLO); SCOTT KOWALCHYK/CBS/GETTY IMAGES (H.E.R.); PRINCE WILLIAMS/GETTY IMAGES (5 SECONDS OF SUMMER)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Spin Art

More than 50 years on, the 1969 Uni-Vibe remains the epitome of rotary pedals.

THE GENUS OF guitar-gear worship includes a significant subcategory that instantly defines a species of eternal classics that we can simply label "anything Jimi used." Among the ever-iconic pedals canonized by Hendrix's touch are the Fuzz Face, Vox Wah-Wah, Roger Mayer Octavia and — the last to land in the chain — the Univox Uni-Vibe. Acquired by the legendary artist in 1969 approximately a year before his death, this effect appeared only on recordings and live performances made after that time, but those that employ it represent a notable evolution in Hendrix's sound, and they likely inspired its use by the many other great guitarists who came along to help show the world what the Uni-Vibe can do.

New solid-state effects units were hitting the ground fast and hard in the late '60s, and some stuck in the market while others faded relatively quickly into obscurity. Despite its emotive sonic capabilities, the Uni-Vibe might have been among the latter if not for a quick re-jig of the supply chain early on. The circuit was designed by Japanese engineer Fumio Mieda in the latter part of the mid '60s and first marketed in Japan around 1967 as the Honey Vibra Chorus.

WHILE IT FEELS NATURAL TO CALL IT A PEDAL, IT WAS CONCEIVED AS A DESK-TOP UNIT FOR KEYBOARDS

With the implosion of the Honey company, the effect was taken up in 1968 by fellow Japanese manufacturer Shin-ei, with a modification added to include an external speed-control pedal. This is the unit supplied for distribution in the U.S. by Univox as the Uni-Vibe.

While it feels natural to call it a pedal, the Uni-Vibe was conceived as a desk-top unit for keyboards and includes no foot switch; the treadle-style external speed pedal cancels out the effect when placed in the heel-down position. In the truest sense, the Uni-Vibe represents the evolution of cumbersome electro-mechanical sound-effects devices into more compact, portable solid-state replications. It was intended as a representation of the rhythmic, swirling, phasey sound of the Leslie rotary speaker that was not only hugely popular with the electronic organ but was also being used more and more with the guitar. Unfortunately, the oversized cabinets were a pain in the back to carry from show to show.

As is so often the case, Mieda's attempt to squeeze the sound of a 140-pound box containing a revolving drum and tweeter horn into a desk-top unit didn't hit the mark precisely. But it created an entirely new sound

ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS

> Entirely analog solid-state circuit
> Four tuned lightbulb-and-photocell phaser stages
> Switch for chorus or vibrato
> Controls for volume and intensity
> External controller pedal for speed

IMAGED BY HERITAGE AUCTIONS, HA.COM

BY DAVE HUNTER

in the process, one that many players would prefer to the original, regardless of weight and portability. The circuit inside the Uni-Vibe's semi-wedge-shaped metal housing is, in fact, a four-stage phaser. Each stage contains a coupled light bulb and photocell and is tuned slightly differently so that a chorusing effect is produced as the oscillator sweeps the signal across them. The unit's Chorus/Vibrato switch let you select a blend of dry and wet signals (Chorus) or go fully wet (Vibrato) for a more throbbing and extreme effect.

Many early chorus pedals were attempts to produce an even more compact, efficient emulation of the Uni-Vibe. As such, the Uni-Vibe is clearly the first of the solid-state effects units that attempts to create a chorus sound, yet it remains a thing unto itself — more a phaser-meets-chorus than a proper member of the chorus pedal family.

The song "Machine Gun" from the 1970 live album *Band of Gypsys* is often cited as a premier example of Hendrix's use of the Uni-Vibe, and indeed it's a good one. But he also made excellent use of the effect on the various live and studio cuts of "Izabella," and perhaps employed it to most dramatic impact in the Woodstock performance of "The Star-Spangled Banner," in which the Uni-Vibe's incessantly swooshing chorus helps cast a psychedelic haze over Hendrix's sonic recreation of the death and destruction then raging in Vietnam.

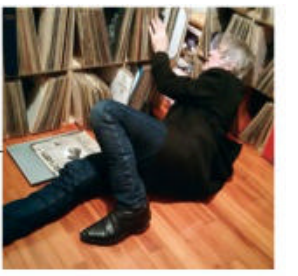
Robin Trower

David Gilmour displayed the Uni-Vibe's ability to enhance dreamy soundscapes on Pink Floyd's "Breathe," from 1973's *The Dark Side of the Moon*, and Robin Trower is invariably cited as another creative proponent of the effect, which is heard throughout his 1974 album, *Bridge of Sighs*. The title track makes a good case for its emotive power, though "Too Rolling Stoned" and "Lady Love" also stand out. Trower, like Hendrix before him, also shows how well a fuzz pedal partners with the Uni-Vibe, pushing it into a chewy, textured, vocal snarl that helps to make the incessant swoosh a little less seasickness-inducing.

Original Shin-ei Uni-Vibes have become extremely collectible, and quite expensive, but several contemporary makers have rendered satisfying re-creations of the sound. The Jim Dunlop company now owns the Uni-Vibe trademark (along with the Jimi Hendrix and MXR trademarks), so competitors have to be creative with their otherwise telltale model names. Fulltone's Deja Vibe and Mini Deja Vibe, Sweet Sound's Ultra Vibe and Mojo Vibe, and Roger Mayer's Voodoo Vibe are all respected and long-standing renditions of the original sound, generally rendered in somewhat reconfigured formats. Relatively high-end, boutique offerings such as the Sabbadius Woodstock Funky-Vibe and Funky-Vibe Fillmore East, and Shin-ei's own Vibe-Bro aim at more thorough re-creations of both form and function, while Voodoo Lab's Micro-Vibe, JHS's Unicorn V2 Analog Uni-Vibe, Dunlop's JHM Series Uni-Vibe and MXR's M68 Uni-Vibe provide more affordable options that yield acclaimed sonic results.

Three of many Uni-Vibe clones include (from left) Shin-e's own Vibe-Bro, the JHS Unicorn V2 Analog Uni-Vibe and Dunlop's Jimi Hendrix '69 Psych Series Uni-Vibe.

FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES (TROWER)



BY JIM CAMPILONGO

Young Man Blues

Slowhand reinvents electric blues with a flamethrower.

A LOT HAS been written about this record, and if you bear with me, kind readers, this is my turn.

Blues Breakers With Eric Clapton, also known as the Beano album, was released on the Decca label in 1966. There are many groundbreaking aspects to the record, not the least of which is Clapton's marriage of a Les Paul through a cranked Marshall amplifier, the guitar equivalent of the Wright Brothers' first flight at Kitty Hawk. This magic coupling was defined by the hands of a spry 21-year-old. His youthful mastery is jaw dropping, and his iconic sound is now a guitar industry standard that at that time reinvigorated interest in the almost forgotten Gibson Les Paul model. Jimmy Page and Jeff Beck weren't yet fully developed, Pete Townshend was more of a rhythm guy, Ritchie Blackmore wasn't really a blues guy, Jimi Hendrix wouldn't release *Are You Experienced* until a year later, and groups like Love, Jefferson Airplane, Them, Big Brother and the Holding Company, Creedence Clearwater Revival and other young acts of the day couldn't stay in the same ring as Clapton. Most guys were struggling to intonate bends and trying not to fall off the log. Meanwhile, E.C. was like Larry Bird.

Clapton wasn't just all sound. He could swing. Pre-*Blues Breakers* guitarists like Bill Jennings, Wes Montgomery, Charlie Christian and dozens, if not hundreds, of others might swing harder, but they didn't have his Les Paul-with-Marshall-on-10 sound and an innate sense of beyond-their-years phrasing.

There are many timeless moments on the Beano LP. The major 7th feedback note that ends "Steppin' Out" is unexpected and sonically imaginative. I almost feel the floor of the recording studio vibrating on the "Key to Love" solo. It's like a jacked stallion busting out of the gate. "Have You Heard" has a great violent blues solo that sounds like Clapton is pissed he had to wait so long to play it. The Clapton vocal track, "Ramblin' on my Mind," introduced a generation of young kids to Robert Johnson, priming listeners to search for the source. It's not a perfect album. John Mayall ain't no Steve Winwood, the multiple guitar tracks sometimes sound cluttered, and while "What I'd Say" might have been a showstopper in a London nightclub, it could have been left off the record. That said, the high points are stellar, and it's all there on *Blues Breakers With Eric Clapton*.

NOT HEARING THE IMPORTANCE AND IMPACT OF *BLUES BREAKERS* IS LIKE WATCHING *CITIZEN KANE* AND OBSERVING, "IT'S ONLY A BLACK-AND-WHITE MOVIE"

In the years since its release, Clapton has sometimes put his foot deep into his mouth, but his doing so makes sense to me. He famously refused to turn down at the Beano sessions. Engineers in lab coats were shocked at his ear-shattering volume. His "you're with me or you're against me" musical focus screams out from the grooves, along with an innate English aesthetic that was structured, organized and almost militaristic. Clapton went on to grow a Bob Ross–style Afro that might have been a tribute to Hendrix, but he'd never play as loose, sexy and beautifully Black as Jimi did. All that said, when I listen to *Blues Breakers With Eric Clapton*, I don't care about the ups and downs of decades with Eric Clapton; I just hear a young man reinventing electric blues.

When young students ask me what inspired me when I was learning, I might play them the swinging genius Clapton exhibits on "Hideaway," where he whips the Freddie King gem into his vision. Yet, more times than not, it underwhelms the uninitiated listener. I think I get it. The world is filled with blues lawyers playing '59 Les Pauls and clowns like Steven Seagal playing beefed-up pentatonics. Listeners shouldn't be confused by this, because not hearing the importance and impact of Eric Clapton on *Blues Breakers* is like watching *Citizen Kane* and observing, "Oh, it's only a black-and-white movie."

Clapton could reach the pre-internet youth with a guitar that sounded like a flamethrower, wrapped in a tidy white package with an acute fashion sense. He repackaged and reinterpreted the blues for a generation, and spliced blues into rock. "Clapton is God" is too much for anyone to live up to, but Eric Clapton is undeniably one the most influential and inspiring guitarists of his generation. *Blues Breakers With Eric Clapton* proves that with each listen.

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25 GREATEST ALT-ROCK GUITARISTS

BRAND-NEW NOISE

IN THE EARLY 1980S, ALTERNATIVE ROCK BROKE THROUGH THE MAINSTREAM IN THE U.S. AND U.K. HERE ARE 25 GUITARISTS WHO FORGED ITS SHAPE AND SOUND, FROM ITS PROTEAN BEGINNINGS TO THE PRESENT DAY.

THE FIRST URGENT stirrings of alternative rock aren't hard to find. Just look for the loudest, noisiest or most iconoclastic bands making a scene in the underground of rock and roll's early years. Long before the term "alternative rock" came into popular use, there existed a strain of guitar groups united in their disregard for convention and commercial acceptance. The earliest prototypes can be found in 1960s garage rock acts like the Seeds and the Standells, whose use of feedback, distortion and inexpert playing laid the groundwork for rock's anti-conventional future genres. A few, like the Velvet Underground and the Stooges, took the music to experimental extremes on albums that remain touchstones for guitarists who have followed.

By the late 1970s, New York City's art rock scene brought us Television, Patti Smith and Talking Heads, proto-alt-rockers who were incorrectly swept into the punk dustpile. Meanwhile, the life force for the future alt-rock movement was underground and growing. It began to emerge in the early 1980s, simultaneously, via R.E.M. in the U.S. and the Smiths in the U.K. Both group's commercial successes opened the door to alt-rock's viability and led directly to the rise of the early '90s alternative explosion.

With the arrival of Nirvana, alt-rock came to the popular music's forefront. The genre dominated for much of the 1990s, but like all movements, it splintered and lost its potency. As the decade faded and the genre fractured further, a few guitarists — Jack White, Radiohead's Jonny Greenwood — emerged as leading lights. Over these next pages, we explore the histories and contributions of these and other guitarists who fueled and continue to power the alternative rock scene.

GARY MILLER/GETTY IMAGES (BARNETT) TIM MOSENFELDER/GETTY IMAGES (FRUSCIANTE)
LARY BUSACCA/GETTY IMAGES (ST.VINCENT) RAFFAELLA CAVALIERI/REDFERNS/GETTY (COBAIN)

25 GREATEST ALT-ROCK GUITARISTS

LOU REED & STERLING MORRISON

(THE VELVET UNDERGROUND)

THE PROTOTYPE FOR ALT-ROCK GUITAR TANDEMS.

MANY GUITARISTS WILL decry the Velvet Underground's lack of guitar expertise, but there is no avoiding the group's impact on alternative rock or its guitarists. Perhaps no album of theirs is as important in this regard as their first and most influential, 1967's *The Velvet Underground & Nico*. Beyond its music and anti-establishment production, the disc gave us the band's guitar tandem of Lou Reed and Sterling Morrison.

As players go, they couldn't be further apart. Reed was the bombastic one, drawing shrieks, squawks and drones from his guitar and creating at times a dense ambience of noise that could be an agitated precursor to the haunting drone of shoegaze. Check out his jagged lead work on "Run, Run, Run," the exotic drones on "All Tomorrow's Parties" or the cacophonous sonic cloud that engulfs "European Son," all three from that remarkable debut.

Morrison, less celebrated, played the more traditional single-note lines and ringing arpeggiations on songs like "Femme Fatale" and "Pale Blue Eyes" from 1969's *The Velvet Underground*.

Performing in 1966

(from left) John Cale, Sterling Morrison and Lou Reed

That's him picking the bluesy sliding lead guitar line that loops hypnotically, and patiently, through "I'm Waiting for the Man." Those sliding notes are a hallmark of Morrison's style, heard on later recordings, like "Pale Blue Eyes" and the *Velvet Underground* outtakes "Foggy Notion" and "Lisa Says."

Bassist Doug Yule, who joined the group following the departure of founding member John Cale in 1968, offered up this first-hand analysis of Reed and Morrison's interplay in a 1997 interview. "Sterling always wound up with the more organized breaks while Lou favored the longer, louder, raunchier ones," he said. "He had a brilliant sense of melody but an imperfect instrument. Sterling seemed to be just the opposite, more a process of technique that lacked a soaring vision."

It was together that they helped each other excel. Their interplay on "Heroin" is remarkable, Morrison's strumming pushing Reed into ever-more frenzied soloing. On "Sister Ray" their guitars, initially distinguishable by each player's style, merge over its 17-plus minutes, until it's impossible to tell who is doing what. On their own, either would be easy to dismiss — Reed too provocative, Morrison too traditional, and both lacking technique — but as a tandem, they did their most revolutionary work. Significantly, their interplay established the template for many future alt-rock groups that featured a guitar duo, one player holding down the floor while the other lifts the music higher.

RECOMMENDED TRACK

"WAITING FOR THE MAN" *(THE VELVET UNDERGROUND & NICO)*

CHARLIE GILLETT COLLECTION/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES (TOP); ADAM RITCHIE/REDFERNS/GETTY (BOTTOM)

Lee Ranaldo

Thurston Moore

THURSTON MOORE & LEE RANALDO (SONIC YOUTH) ▶

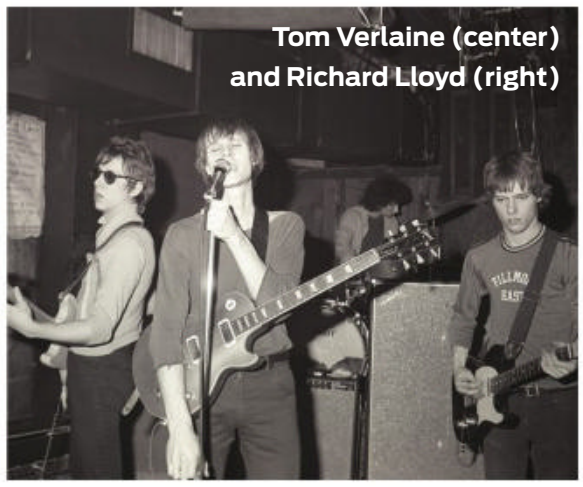
THE GODFATHERS OF ALT-ROCK.

WHILE GUITARISTS LIKE Reed, Morrison, Lloyd and Verlaine established the protocols for alt-rock guitar, the players with the most direct influence on the alt-rock movement that emerged in the 1980s were Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore and Lee Ranaldo. As part of New York City's post-punk no-wave movement, they were a tonic to punk rock's recycled rock riffs. Their unusual tunings, bold harmonic experimentation and pioneering application of noise and textures made Sonic Youth an inspiration to countless bands and players. And if any group served as a bridge between punk and alt-rock, it was Sonic Youth, who created the template for how an indie band could grow in popularity without losing credibility. "We felt very liberated in the early '80s," Moore said, "because suddenly it was okay to be interested in anything — 20th-century composition, avant-garde jazz — rather than having to have that 'punk rules, everything else sucks' mentality."

Wielding Fender Jaguars and, toward the end of the '80s, heavily modified Jazzmasters, Moore and Ranaldo combined punk rock attitude and song structure with open-tuning techniques, and invented one of the most radical approaches to guitar in the history of rock. "We're interested in textural sounds and the blendings of instruments in ways that don't fit into the standard lead and rhythm guitars and rhythm section backing it up," Renaldo told *Melody Maker* in 1985. "The music's got the emotion, the sentiment and the lyrical thinking of rock music. We're a rock band and proud of it. We're not an art, noise or extreme band. We just do what we do." He could have been speaking for the entire alt-rock nation.

RECOMMENDED TRACK
"CANDLE" *(DAYDREAM NATION)*

GIE KNAEPS/GETTY IMAGES (SONIC YOUTH); RICHARD E. AARON/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES (TELEVISION)



Tom Verlaine (center) and Richard Lloyd (right)

RICHARD LLOYD & TOM VERLAINE (TELEVISION) ▲

SIGNS OF INTELLIGENT LIFE.

"WE'RE LIKE BLUES from another planet… like rock music for aliens," Richard Lloyd once said of his groundbreaking New York City art-rock group, Television. "Ahmet Ertegun didn't want to sign us to Atlantic Records because he claimed we didn't play 'Earth Music.' I think he was right."

The key to Television's otherworldly approach was the guitar interplay between Lloyd and Tom Verlaine. Lloyd called their relationship as guitarists "telepathic," and indeed there is a conversation, if not an elaborate dance, taking place in their best work together: Lloyd's trenchant, Hendrix-inspired serpentine solos, performed on his '61 Fender Stratocaster, and Verlaine's slower, blues-inflected lead work, onto which he applied his 1958 Fender Jazzmaster's tremolo. They met in the early 1970s while playing in Greenwich Village clubs. "I saw Tom play and I thought, He's got it. And I knew I had it," Lloyd said. "But I was missing something, and so was he. What he was missing, I could supply. And vice versa."

And so they did. *Marquee Moon*, Television's groundbreaking 1977 debut, is stunning both for its songwriting and their guitar interplay. "All the filigrees and arabesques on *Marquee Moon* are all mine," says Lloyd, while Verlaine works more slowly and traditionally, building speed and harmonic interest as he finds his way forward. Together they carried forth the notion of art rock that fostered punk and, ultimately, the alt-rock movement that followed from it.

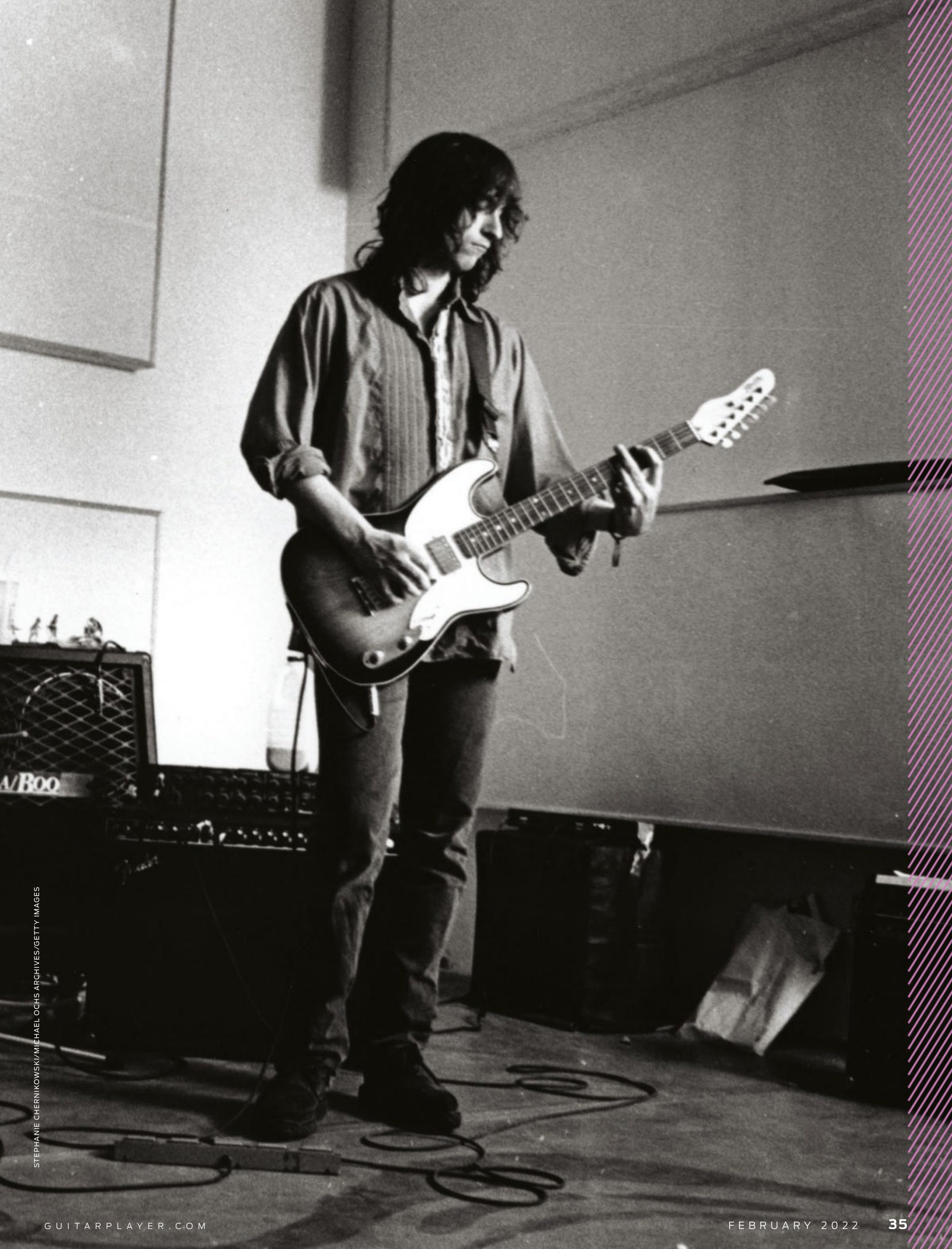
RECOMMENDED TRACK
"SEE NO EVIL" *(MARQUEE MOON)*

25 GREATEST ALT-ROCK GUITARISTS

NEW ADVENTURES IN HI-FI

Armed with a Rickenbacker and a Fender Twin, **Peter Buck** helped R.E.M. put alternative rock on the map. Producer Mitch Easter reveals the genius behind the jangle pop.

BY JOE BOSSO



STEPHANIE CHERNIKOWSKI/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

Before it was alternative rock, it was post-punk, and before that it was garage rock. For a brief period in the early '80s, however, the preferred nomenclature was college rock, and the undisputed kings of the scene were R.E.M.

"Sometimes terms can be such funny things," says Mitch Easter, the North Carolina–based producer and musician who guided the sessions for R.E.M.'s first four recordings. "*College rock* — we never took that one seriously. We just thought, Oh, college stations are playing the music? That's good. It wasn't something we really bothered ourselves with."

By 1980, Easter was already something of a happening music figure in and around his hometown of Winston-Salem. He had played guitar in a number of local bands, some of them featuring his childhood pal Chris Stamey, who would go on to achieve indie success as a member of the dB's and as a solo performer. That same year, Easter eyed a move into production, so he converted his parents' garage into a small recording space and dubbed it the Drive-In Studio, offering super-low rates as an enticement to young talent.

"THEIR ATTITUDE WAS, 'WE'RE A REAL BAND. WE WRITE OUR OWN SONGS.' THAT WAS DIFFERENT"

"I had 16 tracks," Easter recalls. "It was the beginning of the indie studio scene, and a lot of small places only had eight tracks, which is perfectly legit. But I wanted to leapfrog that and go into what I considered to be big-time pro recording. We had a simple console, a handful of microphones and two compressors, and I also had a two-inch 3M tape machine from a studio in Atlanta. The Drive-In was pretty new when R.E.M. came in. I had recorded three or four bands there by then, but I was still puttering around and getting it figured out."

Only together for a year at the time, R.E.M. — guitarist Peter Buck, singer Michael Stipe, bassist Mike Mills and drummer Bill Berry — were growing out of the blossoming music scene of Athens, Georgia, and Easter quickly recognized they were different from many of the groups of the day. "A lot of bands simply wanted to fit in, but R.E.M. always wanted to be themselves," he says. "I guess a correct way of putting it would be 'cocky.' They were like, 'We rule. Here we come, so get out of the way.' It wasn't so much a careerist mindset; rather, it was their insistence on pure artistry. They meant it. When I first heard them, I thought, Yes. I know what to do with this. This is going to be great."

Easter produced R.E.M.'s first single, 1981's "Radio Free Europe," released on the tiny, Atlanta-based Hib-Tone label. A year later, he recorded the band's debut for I.R.S. Records, the five-song EP *Chronic Town*. For the group's first full-length album, 1983's *Murmur*, and its follow-up, 1984's *Reckoning*, operations shifted to Reflection Studios in nearby Charlotte, where Easter assumed co-producing and engineering duties with his old friend Don Dixon. "I.R.S. insisted on us using 24 tracks for the albums, and Reflection was a great studio," Easter says. "Don had worked there a lot, so we were a good match. He's a good musician and a really good recording guy, and he improved the outcome of everything we did."

The importance of those four recordings cannot be overstated. By distilling the essential elements of garage rock, post-punk, country and even folk into their own special concoction — one that was by turns spooky and engaging, enigmatic and fiercely direct — R.E.M. created a sound that seemed to exist in a previously unchartered world, and they provided inspiration to countless young bands to follow suit. Over the years, and while working with a succession of different producers (Joe Boyd, Don Gehman, Scott Litt, Pat McCarthy and Jacknife Lee), the band pulled off something rare and magical in the annals of music, opening up their sound enough to crack the mainstream while retaining their idiosyncratic ambitions.

"I've always been a bit surprised at some of the musical analysis of R.E.M.," Easter says, "because to me, they were always in the grand tradition of rock bands. When they came out, perhaps some of the young people who heard them didn't know garage rock. At the time, even a band like the Sex Pistols, who used to be considered so bold, now sounded like a classic band in many ways. So to hear Peter Buck, he sounded different than what everybody else was doing. I guess there's a lot of reasons why R.E.M. shot ahead. I'm just glad that I was able to be a part of it."

Could you expand on what first struck you about R.E.M. and why you thought they were special?
Well, the first thing I should say is, I really liked them personally. We had a good time just talking and stuff. But they struck me as the kind of band that could really do the thing. A lot of bands were cover bands, and if they wrote songs, they did so tentatively. R.E.M. had a different mindset. They weren't doing cover tunes on weekends at frats. Their attitude was, "We're a real band. We write our own songs." At the time, especially in our area, that was different. And, of course, musically, they were good. I didn't have to tell them how to play. They knew their music.

EBET ROBERTS/GETTY IMAGES

Peter Buck with his Rickenbacker 330, July 1986

Buck and Michael Stipe onstage at the Beacon Theater, New York CIty, July 21, 1984

What were your initial impressions of Peter Buck as a guitarist?
I just appreciated the fact that he was distinctive. It seemed like guitar players were a dime a dozen, but Peter had an identifiable sound, and not the least of that came from his equipment choices. He played a Rickenbacker with these old, heavy flatwound strings, and I think that made him play a certain way — more deliberate and clear. And I don't mean in terms of distortion; I mean musically clear. You have to mean business when your guitar fights back like that. I thought it was great. I'd heard enough distorted fifths already, so I was delighted to hear somebody do something else.

"PETER HAD AN IDENTIFIABLE SOUND, AND NOT THE LEAST OF THAT CAME FROM HIS EQUIPMENT CHOICES"

Which Rickenbacker model did he come in with at first?
He had a blonde 360, and then he got the black one that everybody knows. Sometimes he would use my guitars. We'd be working on a track, and I'd say, "You know what would be great? In the chorus, maybe try out this Fender 12-string of mine." That's how the 12-string crept into some of their stuff.

What amps was Peter using at first?
He had a Fender Twin, and that's what we recorded with. I remember when we were doing "Pilgrimage" at Reflection Studio in Charlotte, the Twin was in the shop. [*"Pilgrimage" was recorded prior to* Murmur *as a "test" for I.R.S. Records.*] I didn't have anything with me, but there was a Kasino solid-state amp in the studio, so we used that, and it sounded great. I think some people might faint knowing that we used this little 25-watt solid-state practice amp, but it had a really nice sound. There were oddball things like that.

For *Murmur*, he still didn't have his amp back, so he used my Ampeg G-15. That amp and the Kasino are what's on *Murmur*. When they came in to do *Reckoning*, he had his Twin back. But if you're a distinctive-sounding guy like him, you sound like yourself no matter what.

Peter could do more with his rhythm playing than a lot of two-guitar bands. Did he ever try out what we might call conventional solos?
He would say that he didn't know how to play solos, and he was like, "And I don't care." Which I thought was fine. That attitude was in the air with punk. I mean, I like a good solo, but I've heard so many boring ones. If you don't want to solo, great — do

EBET ROBERTS /GETTY IMAGES

R.E.M. performing at the Rat in Boston in 1983. (from left) Buck, Stipe, Mike Mills and (out of frame) Bill Berry

LAURA LEVINE/CORBIS/GETTY IMAGES

something else. Later, he dabbled a bit, but he never really got into that, and it didn't hurt him.

At the time, journalists applied the term *jangle* to his sound. Did that ever bother him?

I don't know. I mean, that word crept in, and it built over the decades. I found it a little bit offensive, because it was always put in contrast to some sort of he-man guitar playing that was highly predictable. But I have discovered in recent years that the word has had a total rehabilitation, because when I talk to young people who come into the studio now, they think the word is totally cool. I don't know what Peter thought of it. He's the type of guy who would be like, "I don't give a shit." I feel like that the blame for that word goes entirely back to the song "Mr. Tambourine Man." Maybe it's been retroactively applied to the Byrds.

Generally speaking, did you do a fair amount of guitar overdubs, or did you mainly go for a live sound?

We always tracked like a band and recorded everything. If something needed fixing, we'd go back and fix it. They'd sit in the control room, and we'd punch in a lot. But a lot of what happened was based on what they did on the floor. They didn't make a lot of mistakes; they were an efficient band. We would add stuff, and a lot of that came from me: "This should get thicker here, so play this guitar and we'll make it fuzzy."

There was a bit of a hiccup in the early days when the band tried working with producer Stephen Hague for *Murmur*. That didn't go so well, though.

It's not so much *they* tried that out; rather, I.R.S. Records insisted they try it out. They did the session with him, and it was a bad match. He was a modern synth guy, so that was doomed from the start. Plus, he did all that producer stuff, making Bill Berry play every drum part 50 times. When they came back to work with us on "Pilgrimage," I could tell that Bill's confidence had been shaken.

I'm sure that Stephen felt like his job was to "clean up these boys" so they can go to the top. Whereas Don and I were a lot more cavalier in our attitude toward working on this stuff. We were going to make records that we liked. Fortunately, the band was very headstrong and prevailed, and Don Dixon and I ended up doing *Murmur*. And, of course, I'm proud to say that *Murmur* is the *Dark Side of the Moon* of the new-wave era.

In regard to Peter's playing, it's hard to pick a quintessential track from that time, but I've always loved his arpeggios and little lead lines in "Wolves, Lower." Did he have all that worked out?

Oh yeah. If you've ever tried to play that song, it's pretty fast and you have to try not to miss any of the notes. When they came up with that song, I thought, Wow, these guys have gotten better. Peter could just play like that. He could arpeggio the shit out of stuff and not miss a note. Not since Hilton Valentine [*the Animals' original guitarist*] have I heard anybody as perfect at playing arpeggios for four minutes straight without missing a note.

"THE DARK SECRET OF *RECKONING* IS THAT WE ALSO USED A SCHOLZ ROCKMAN"

They rocked harder on *Reckoning*. "Harborcoat," "Pretty Persuasion," "Second Guessing" — those are blazing tracks.

I think it just happened. They were always rocking live. When you see footage of them playing pre-*Murmur*, they're like a punk band. When they made *Murmur*, they weren't being contrary, but I think they were aware of the clichés they could become, and they didn't want to do that. I think that they thought, Okay, we love all this punk, but we're going to make a record that is thoughtful, textured and interesting. But that took a little work to remind them that they had that instinct, because the Stephen Hague thing had freaked them out about anything that you might do in the studio. They were prepared to make this live-in-the-studio thing with those songs, which was really going to undersell them. By the time they did *Reckoning*, their lives were moving faster, and so they just went with it for a while. Not totally, but a little.

Mitch Easter performing with his group Let's Active during the Big Star's *Third* concert at College Square in Athens, Georgia, November 8, 2014

CHRIS MCKAY/GETTY IMAGES

On "So. Central Rain (I'm Sorry)," they sound very comfortable putting their feet close to the line of being commercial.

Right. They were semi-highfalutin, but they were highfalutin in a correct way. They had some standards, but they weren't weird purists. They weren't unrealistic. If they got on the radio, that was okay with them, but I don't think they catered to it. They were very easy for me to relate to because I had the same aesthetics. I don't hate commercial music at all.

They wanted to check out the universe of playing in a band and doing all the stuff you can do. They just didn't want to be stupid or clichéd about it, although no doubt, they had times where they acted exactly like Mötley Crüe or something. They weren't too pure to do some of the rock stuff, and they weren't too pure to consider having hits, but they weren't going to pander to that either.

Stipe and Buck onstage at McGaw Hall, in Chicago, May 6, 1985

PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES

Was Peter experimenting with different guitars on *Reckoning*?

He had his own Rickenbacker 12-string at that point. On *Reckoning*, you hear that, but you also still hear my Fender 12. Of course, the dark secret of *Reckoning* is that we also used a Scholz Rockman. I love those things. They were a total joke to some people, but I thought the Rockman was very useful in the R.E.M. sonic palette of the day. When you hear that record, you're hearing amps and a bit of Rockman.

We must certainly talk about the MVP of R.E.M. — Mike Mills. His athletic bass playing was crucial to the brilliance of those songs.

That's right. Mike's great. He's super strong and solid. Back then, he played with a pick, which I loved. It was so good for their kind of aggression. The band had a real forward movement about them, matched by Bill Berry's drumming.

Because Mike didn't just stick to root notes, he could fill in the sound a great deal.

Oh, absolutely. He and Peter really complemented each other. There was always a counterpoint thing that was really great. The lead up to the chorus on "Radio Free Europe," there's that ascending bassline — it's really catchy. Mike certainly knew how to play. The stuff he did was really good. It was very important to the total thing.

You've always been very gracious about the fact they went on to record with other producers. No sour grapes at all?

Well, that's just because I'm nice as hell. [*laughs*] But seriously, I'm so glad I got to work on some stuff that people cared about. They're one of the biggest bands of all time, and I got to be there. I had some influence on them for a while, and it was fun. I just felt it was great that all of us were getting to do the thing.

25 GREATEST ALT-ROCK GUITARISTS

THESE THINGS TAKE TIME

Rejecting traditional rock guitar stylings, **Johnny Marr** created a new ethos that defined alternative rock and placed it at the forefront of the U.K.'s 1980s music scene.

BY MARK McSTEA

IN 1982, I was on friendly terms with Smiths' guitar maestro Johnny Marr. We met when he was working in a pretty cool, alternative clothing store in Manchester, England, and he recognized me from the band that I was in, Private Sector. I'd see him in the store, at shows of other bands and some of my own shows, and we used to talk music, of course, and often the guitar in particular. We seemed to have a lot of musical interests in common, but I lost track of Johnny a few months before he formed the Smiths with Morrissey, and we never reconnected after that time. I remember being very curious to see what his new band would come up with, and when a mutual acquaintance, who had been at one of their earliest live shows at the Ritz, in Manchester, in 1982, recounted what the band sounded like, we were both initially a little nonplussed. Given Morrissey's long-avowed love of the New York Dolls and Marr's rock and roll stylings, we had expected something along much more conventional lines. Of course, the Smiths were anything but conventional, and yet they used the most conventional of formats — a guitar, bass, drums and a vocal — to create something that was extraordinarily unique, and which would influence legions of musicians on both sides of the Atlantic for the next 40 years.

The arrival of the Smiths in 1983, with the release of their debut single, "Hand in

DONNA SANTISI/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Glove," came at a time when the U.K. music scene was a strangely divided place. At that point there were four weekly music papers: *New Musical Express* (*NME*), *Sounds*, *Melody Maker* and *Record Mirror*. Of the four, *Sounds* and *NME* acted as both tastemakers and reflectors of what was current. They divided, fairly neatly, into two camps: *Sounds* continued to promote punk and its offshoot genre, "Oi" music, and also championed the emerging New Wave of British Heavy Metal (NWOBHM). The *NME* saw itself as defiantly anti what had gone before, ignoring the burgeoning metal scene, and instead decided that anything rock was inherently bad. Several *NME* journalists started to liberally use the terms *rockist* and *rockism* as pejoratively derisory digs at anything a band did that could fall under the traditional rock ethos. Thus, no guitar solos, no guitar riffs, no guitar heroes, no macho posturing, no extravagant stage shows, no rock and roll excess and so on.

Into this divide, any new band would have a tacit understanding that if their face didn't fit the new orthodoxy at the *NME*, they would be unlikely to get any coverage. Of course, *Sounds* would still cover some bands from the other side of the battlefield, but the lines were drawn. There was no way a band like Iron Maiden, at the forefront of NWOBHM, could ever appear in the *NME*.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE SMITHS PROFOUNDLY UNCHECKED EVERY BOX ON THE ROCKIST HIT LIST. THIS CAN SURELY HAVE BEEN NO COINCIDENCE

Set against this background, the emergence of the Smiths profoundly unchecked every box on the rockist hit list. This could surely have been no coincidence. Speaking from my recollections of knowing Marr for some time before he teamed up with Morrissey, he was certainly not prime fodder for becoming a darling of the *NME*. He was a keen rockabilly and rock and roll fan. Rory Gallagher and Nils Lofgren were two of his biggest heroes, he had more than a passing fondness for Johnny Thunders, and the walls of the clothing store where he worked prior to teaming up with Morrissey were adorned with his posters of the Clash and the Stray Cats.

Marr's own sense of personal style even saw him looking like a member of those two groups, with his pompadour, leather biker jacket and biker boots. None of this is to suggest that there was anything fake about his new stance upon forming the Smiths. There was always another side to Marr's musical loves, particularly an interest in the folk stylings of the likes of Bert Jansch and Davy Graham, traces of which were much easier to detect in his guitar work with the Smiths. His use of a thumbpick for some years was a self-confessed inspiration from Lofgren's use of the implement, something which facilitated the latter's chiming harmonics.

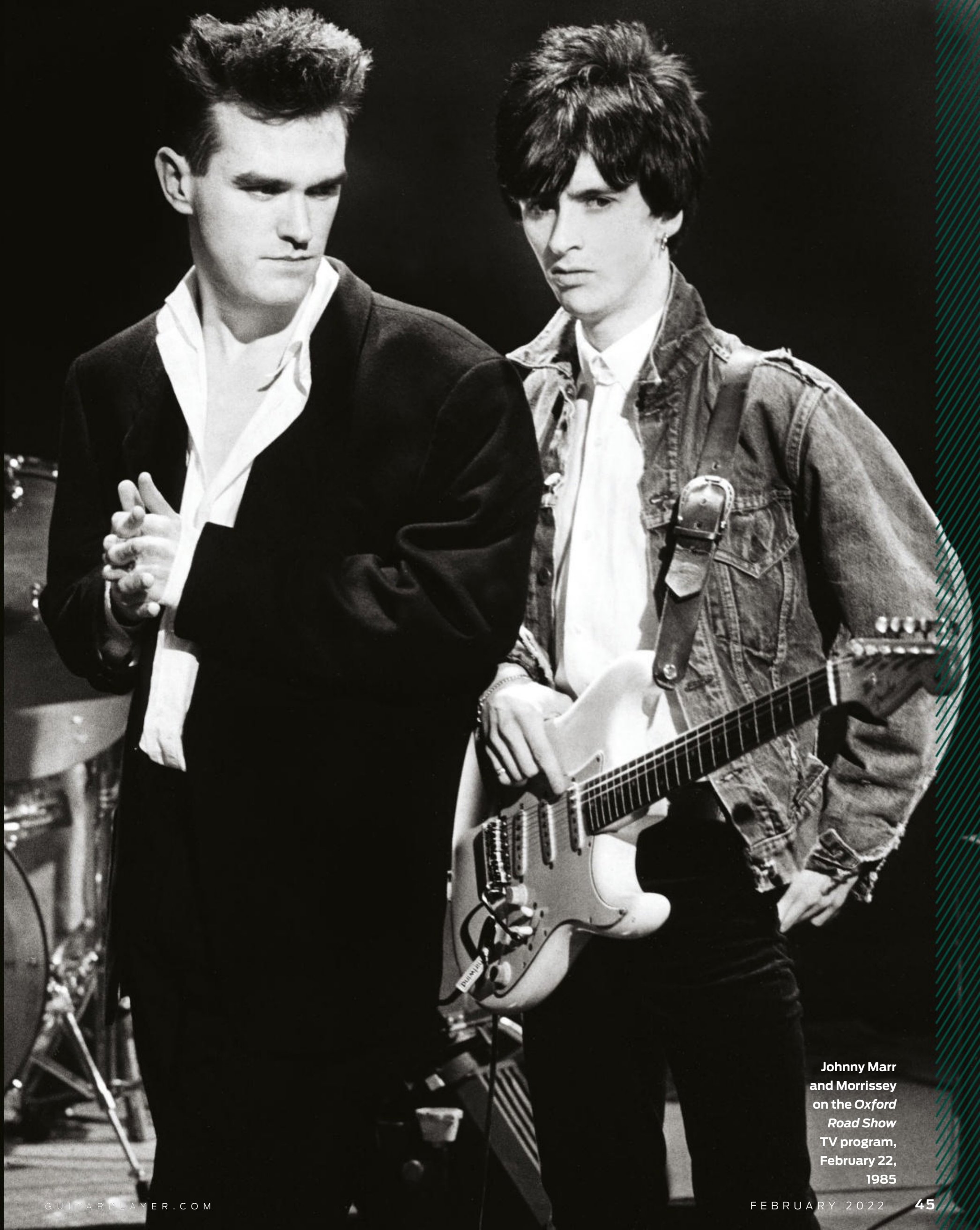
Effectively, Marr selected from his influences those which would most closely ally with what he knew Morrissey would like to hear in his playing, the key elements of which would offset the singer's nontraditional approach while simultaneously rejecting anything that clashed with the new orthodoxy. As much as Marr tailored his musical approach to the emerging *NME*-defined concept of what was hip and happening, he also radically revamped his own personal image, presenting a complete volte-face from '50s rocker to sensitive '60s hipster. Perhaps ironically, Morrissey himself actually embraced a sense of style borrowed heavily from one of his own idols, James Dean. Apparently, Morrissey had a life-sized cardboard cut-out of the tragic film icon on his bedroom wall the first time Marr called round to his house to suggest forming a band.

Johnny Rogan, author of *Morrissey and Marr: The Severed Alliance*, seen by many as the definitive Smiths' bio (although it is disliked by Marr and detested by the always more extreme Morrissey), didn't pick up on Marr's compliance with the *NME* new world order. But Rogan did note that Marr had the "unconscious ability to accentuate those elements of his musical taste that coincided with Morrissey's, while conveniently passing over such infatuations as Rory Gallagher." Morrissey himself, in early interviews with the band, made it clear that he was no fan of what had gone before when it came to the role of the guitar in a band, referring to "nasty solos" and stating that the guitar had been "wasted" in the ways that it had been used hitherto in conventional rock music.

The very name of the band, the Smiths, couldn't be more unassuming and low-key. Apparently suggested by Morrissey, it is a clear indicator that he was also aiming for a sense of something very unlike the expected rock norms, a music that was a reaction to every expected rock and roll trope. Morrissey himself fit that description perfectly. His vocal stylings recalled no other artist; his lyrics were utterly unlike those of the bands he'd loved growing up. He projected an ambiguous sexuality that drew in devoted followers of all genders with a completely non-threatening, all-inclusive call for the disaffected who may have felt uncomfortable with the bare-chested bravado of a Robert Plant, but perhaps saw a kindred spirit in the ultimate '80s alternative-rock icon that Morrissey rapidly became.

Marr may not have been the first alternative-guitar hero to eschew the guitar solo. Johnny Ramone instantly springs to mind as a trailblazer on that front, but the buzzsaw blitzkrieg of Ramone's Mosrite was a

STEPHEN WRIGHT/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES



Johnny Marr and Morrissey on the *Oxford Road Show* TV program, February 22, 1985

PETE CRONIN/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

The Smiths onstage in 1984. (from left) Andy Rourke, Mike Joyce, Morrissey and Marr

one-dimensional blunt instrument, thrilling as it was. Marr's nimble, multifaceted approach, shaped by his early attempts to try to cover the bass, guitar and orchestral parts of classic Motown records on his instrument, forged the Smiths' unique sound. As much as Rory Gallagher was a hero of his, there is virtually no blues in Marr's playing in the Smiths. His bright, complex guitar lines — weaving inside each other in multiple layers, while deftly providing a platform for Morrissey's entirely unconventional vocal stylings and melodies — created a music unlike any of their contemporaries or anything that had gone before. The hugely influential and important British DJ John Peel, who featured the band on numerous specially recorded sessions for his nightly radio show, succinctly hit the nail on the head when he said that when you listened to the music of the Smiths, it was hard to discern who their influences were, so singular was their sound.

MARR REINVENTED THE GUITAR SOLO, SUBSTITUTING LAYERED ARPEGGIOS AND SLIDING PARTIAL CHORDS FOR TRADITIONAL, BLUES-INFLECTED LICKS

That Marr found a unique approach to the notion of guitar hero, in a climate of revilement for the concept from so many quarters in the U.K. at that time, is a testament to his creative spark and ability to think outside the box without abandoning much of what makes the guitar such a key part of any great pop song. Effectively, Marr reinvented the guitar solo, substituting layered arpeggios and sliding partial chords for traditional, blues-inflected licks, and swapping rippling, melodic motifs for old-school, pentatonic-based riffery.

The key elements of Marr's guitar style, and consequently the sound of the Smiths, were built upon his choice of instrument in the early years: the Rickenbacker 330. It delivered the kind of sonic texture that claimed its own soundspace while, and presumably not accidentally, it didn't look or sound like the Les Pauls and Strats of classic rock. Once the Smiths had scored some success, Marr obviously felt more comfortable embracing the pariahs of the rockist past, playing a variety of Gibsons and even acknowledging his own rock and roll influences with references to Elvis, Bo Diddley and James Burton on various Smiths tracks. He even reinstated his pompadour.

Marr laid out his philosophy very clearly in an interview with Joe Gore for *Guitar Player* in January 1990: "There's a lot of guitar culture that I don't like

THIS CHARMING MAN

Johnny Marr on the making of the Smiths' classic, and the dark "clang" of his beloved '64 Fender Telecaster.

Marr's Roger Giffin Telecaster was used on numerous Smiths recordings and elsewhere.

"THE FIRST TIME I ever used a Telecaster was the day I recorded 'This Charming Man.' The sound of that intro was always assumed to be a Rickenbacker, because that's what I was most known for at the time, but it is actually mostly a '54 Tele — maybe a '53 — that belonged to the producer [*John Porter*], tracked with a Rickenbacker, so it is quite an interesting sound. It really suited my super-clean sound, but it still had plenty of attitude. The combination of that '50s Tele and the Rickenbacker was perfect for what I was looking for. Quite quickly, I was lucky enough to acquire a few different guitars, but I made it my business to get a Tele.

"My most famous one is my green sunburst Roger Giffin. My wife, who was then my girlfriend, very kindly wanted to get me a gift, and the great Alan Rogan [*Pete Townshend's guitar tech*] tipped her off to this one-off that Roger Giffin had made. A lot of people remember it because it is very distinctive looking, but Alan recommended it to me because it sounded very unusual. It's maple, so it weighs an absolute ton, and it has a lot of brass on it. It has a very distinctive sound. I was only a little slip of a thing when I got it [*laughs*], so I could only play two songs with it before I had to go and lie down. I still have that guitar. It has a coil-tap on it, which I disabled. To this day, I do not know what the pickups are on there. They might be really early Seymour Duncans, knowing Roger.

"I used that Tele mostly on *Meat Is Murder* – "Nowhere Fast" and the title track. By the time of the last Smiths album, I had acquired a mid-'60s Tele, which had been customized with a humbucker in the neck position.

"Right now I have four or five Telecasters, mostly '60s models. I've got a '64, and I really like that period because I want that clean, classic Tele thing, but they're just slightly darker. It's a combination of the bodies and the fingerboard being rosewood. I like that darker clang. I've still got the black-and-white Custom one, and in the 2000s Fender gave me a Custom Shop early '60s reissue, Olympic [*White*] with the black guard."

— *Jonathan Horsley*

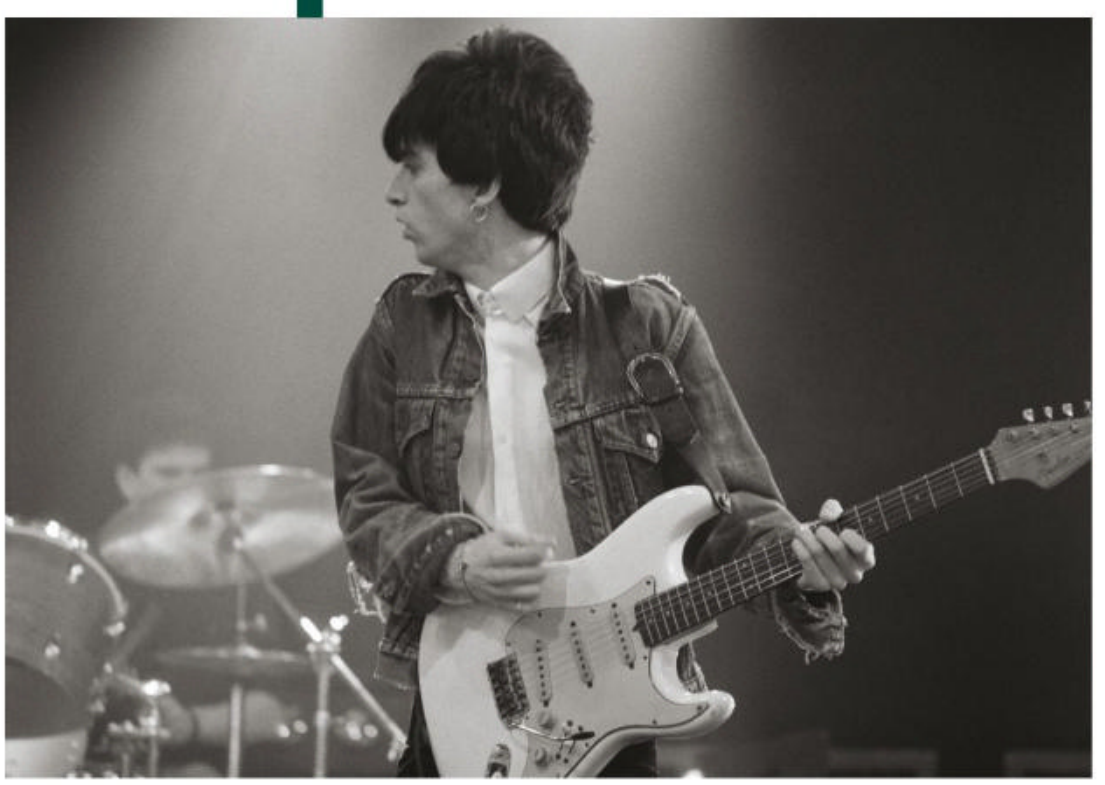
at all. I find the traditional idea of the guitar hero to be really irrelevant to the 1990s. I don't think that young people are that impressed with some guy brandishing spandex trousers and a hideously shaped guitar, playing that kind of masturbatory, egotistical noise. Being a soloist who just wants to display virtuosity is a dated philosophy, and I don't think that there's any room for it in pop music. It's the last stand of late '60s/early '70s rockism, and it should have gone a long time ago." Marr went to such lengths to avoid any connection to the traditions of rock guitar playing that he removed the Marshall logo from his 2x10 cabinets. He was unambiguous when he reiterated to Gore, "We were against cock-rock guitar solos and the American music scene at the time."

THE REAL LEGACY OF THE SMITHS IS THEIR ABILITY TO FIND NUMEROUS WAYS TO REINVENT THE ROLE OF THE GUITAR IN A BAND

When Marr presented his first songs to Morrissey, as they forged the ingredients of the sonic stew that became the Smiths, he found that he needed to adjust the keys of the ideas he was coming up with, either tuning up a full step or employing a capo at the second fret. The byproduct of this happy accommodation was a further brightening of his sound, something that became the perfect foil to Morrissey's lyrical ideas, which could often stray into darkly ambiguous areas.

"This Charming Man," released in 1983, saw the blueprint for the archetypal Smiths sound coalesce perfectly. Marr's guitar sparkled and chimed, with elements of African highlife music fighting for space with a touch of what appeared to be Roger McGuinn–inspired Rickenbacker flourishes. According to Marr in the January 1990 *GP* interview, "There are about 15 tracks of guitar. People thought the main part was a Rickenbacker, but it was really a '54 Tele. There are three tracks of acoustic, a backwards guitar with a really long reverb, and the effect of dropping knives on the guitar. That comes in at the end of the chorus." That last comment tells you all you need to know about Marr's relentless search for the perfect tone or means of expressing an idea, no matter how unconventional it might be.

***Oxford Road Show*, February 22, 1985**

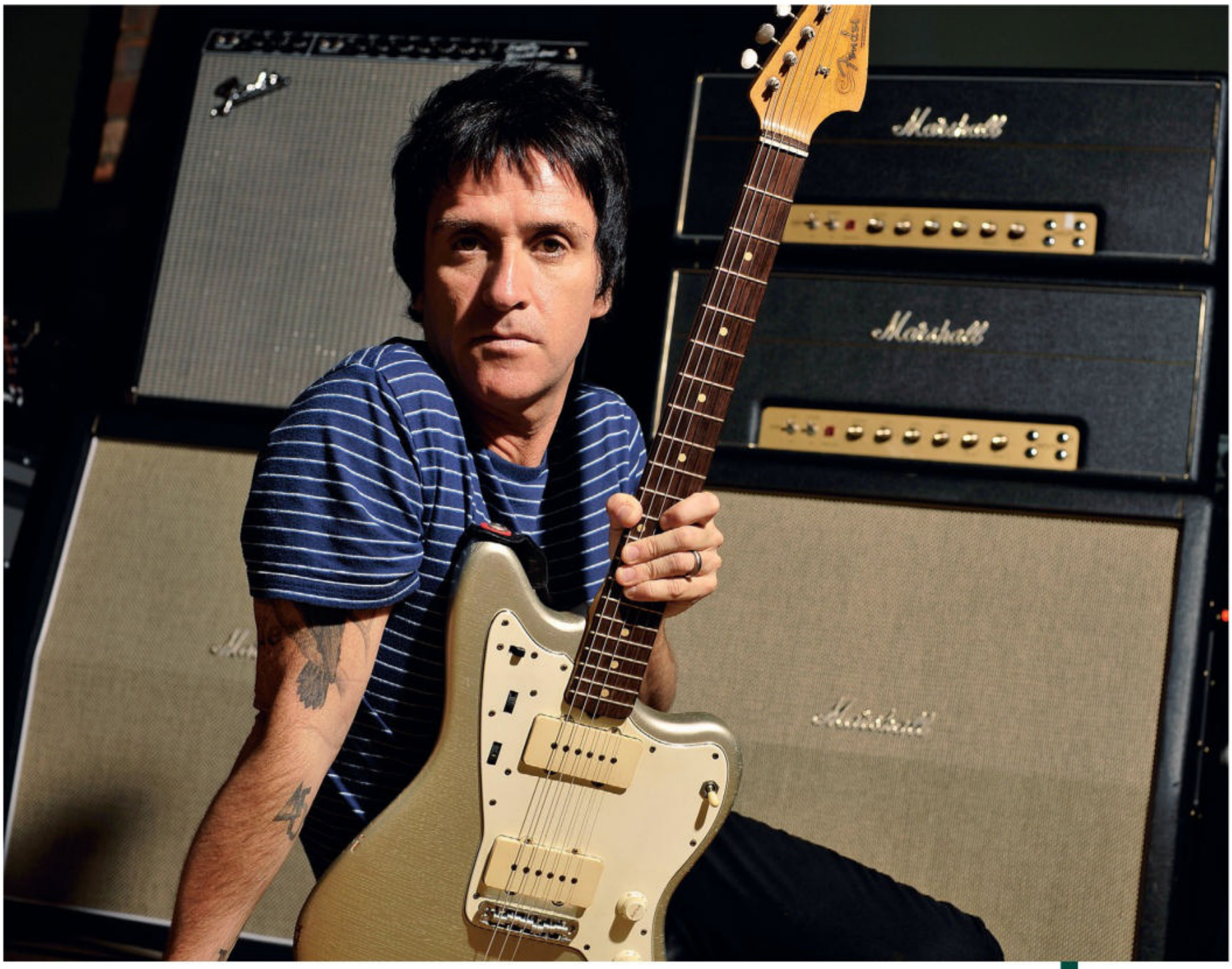


KEVIN CUMMINS/GETTY IMAGES

The oft-postulated theory that McGuinn was an influence on Marr's sound was somewhat dispelled when he told Gore, "I did like the Byrds, but not as much as people make out… The jingle-jangle comes from James Honeyman-Scott of the Pretenders. He was the last important influence on my playing before I went out on my own." In 2008, Marr stated in an interview with U.K. magazine *Mojo* that he came up with the idea for "This Charming Man" after hearing "Walk Out to Winter" by Sire label mates Aztec Camera, a band then plowing a similar furrow to the Smiths with bright jangling guitars and an unconventional approach to the art of the guitar solo. Marr revealed that he had deliberately set out to write a bright, upbeat song and specifically utilized the key of G to facilitate that end, explaining that he would never normally conceive of writing anything in G.

A spin through the Smiths' back catalog quickly makes it abundantly apparent that Marr and Morrissey had found a way to complement each other in numerous iterations of musical chiaroscuro. Marr could bring a sense of femininity in his lightness of touch to Morrissey's new take on masculinity, a simplicity to the complexity of Morrissey's lyrics. Marr's guitar glistened like sunshine on water, like church bells chiming and brightly shining, while Morrissey's lyrics could explore the darkest of themes. At times it was almost like the summer of love meeting the winter of gloom, although the humor in Morrissey's lyrics was often overlooked, or perhaps deliberately ignored by critics in their quest to bring down the always controversial spokesman for a generation.

Many of the finest moments of Marr's work with the Smiths have been dissected and discussed. Marr himself can be found in clips all over YouTube explaining how he found ideas, created sounds and crafted the complex layering of guitars that, ironically, would often sound anything but dense, and instead explode with effervescence. What is not so often discussed is how much of an influence Morrissey was on the guitarist's musical approach. It is worth noting that the four-year age gap between them is a much wider chasm at the age of 18, when Marr teamed up with Morrissey, than it would be in later years. Marr



Marr in his studio with his 1963 Fender Jazzmaster

JESSE WILD

was impressed by Morrissey's sense of direction, conviction and supreme self-confidence. The sheer chutzpah that the singer brought to the Smiths' live shows and early TV appearances is what made them instantly memorable, while Marr often looked somewhat ill at ease onstage in the band's early years.

The studio was where Marr shone brightest and where he could assume more control of the band's musical direction, but there can be no doubt that Morrissey's hand was firmly on the rudder. A case in point was his dislike for "What Difference Does It Make," one of Marr's most celebrated guitar constructions, but one the singer thought a little too redolent of the traditional rock that the Smiths sought to usurp. It was removed from the band's live sets for a considerable period at Morrissey's insistence.

In the end it was Marr's frustration with Morrissey's conception of what the Smiths should be that caused him to leave the band. His oft-quoted statement "I didn't form a band to play Cilla Black covers" makes it clear that Marr didn't feel he could control where the band was heading. Morrissey's love of Black and other Brit '60s popsters was but another facet of his entire stylistic direction. He unapologetically wore his influences on his sleeve, whereas Marr's lack of respect for some of the singer's heroes and heroines lead to a widening of the cracks that had been developing in the band's unity for some time.

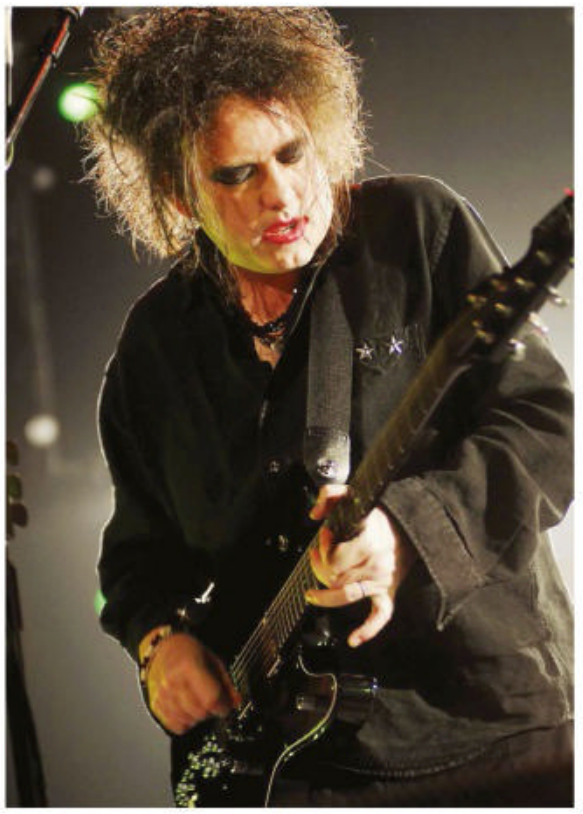
For many, the Smiths simply define the very notion of indie rock, and although there have been numerous bands where the influence of Morrissey and Marr is apparent, none have ever managed to capture the once-in-a-lifetime genius that was the Smiths at their finest. Their real legacy is their ability to find numerous ways to reinvent the role of the guitar in a band, to challenge all of the accepted traditions of what a pop band could do and to dare to forge an entirely exceptional path through the cliché-strewn landscape of rock and pop history. They created a new music that used the most time-honored traditional ingredients to deliver songs that defined an era and inspired lifelong, die-hard loyalty in fans around the world, many of whom have gone on to become significant players in the music business themselves.

The final word is best left to Marr, who said in 2020, "Guitar culture had many crimes and criminals. Rock was about virtuosity, and machismo was lurking everywhere. The art of the song had disappeared. I've tried to wipe out the memories of poodle-cuts, but the Smiths was definitely a reaction."

25 GREATEST ALT-ROCK GUITARISTS

ROBERT SMITH (THE CURE) ▼

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN.



IN THE CURE'S videos, he was traditionally seen without a guitar, leaving the impression that former coguitarist Porl Thompson was behind the group's densely shimmering six-string magic. But Robert Smith is an excellent guitarist who's applied his colorful tones and melodies to the group's songs in the studio. "Even people who are quite close to the band are surprised to learn that I played the solo on 'The Edge of the Deep Green Sea,'" he told *Guitar Player* in 1990. "Everyone would immediately assume it's Porl." While many of the Cure's detractors have probably let Smith's personal flamboyance divert their attention from the band's phenomenal pop craftsmanship and stylistic range, as their gargantuan worldwide following proves, the Cure combine sublime pop and heartfelt expressivity like no other band. As the group's only constant member, Smith richly deserves his due.

RECOMMENDED TRACK
"FRIDAY I'M IN LOVE" (WISH)

KEVIN SHIELDS (MY BLOODY VALENTINE) ▶

ALT-ROCK'S DALI.

WHERE OTHER GUITARISTS have bags of technique, Kevin Shields has originality. As the leader of My Bloody Valentine, he led the group through a pair of albums — 1988's *Isn't Anything* and 1991's *Loveless* — that remain alt-rock cornerstones and ground zero for shoegaze. But it was on their 1990 EP, *You Made Me Realise*, that Shields found his secret weapon. Wielding a borrowed 1964 Fender Jazzmaster with a tremolo, he discovered he could use the device to make his notes warble and drop. Applying backward reverb, he created waves of sound that made the whole production teeter woozily as if in

a dreamscape. The resulting "glide guitar" became his plaything. "It was like a new toy, really," he says. Shields influenced many other alt-rock mainstays, including Dinosaur Jr's J Mascis and Smashing Pumpkins' Billy Corgan, and went on to work with numerous acts, from Yo La Tengo to Patti Smith. No less than Vernon Reid declared of him, "He achieved a wholeness and a unity. He created his own sound." In doing so, he tremendously expanded guitar's sonic palette for everyone else.

RECOMMENDED TRACK
"SLOW" *(YOU MADE ME REALISE)*

JOEY SANTIAGO (PIXIES) ▶

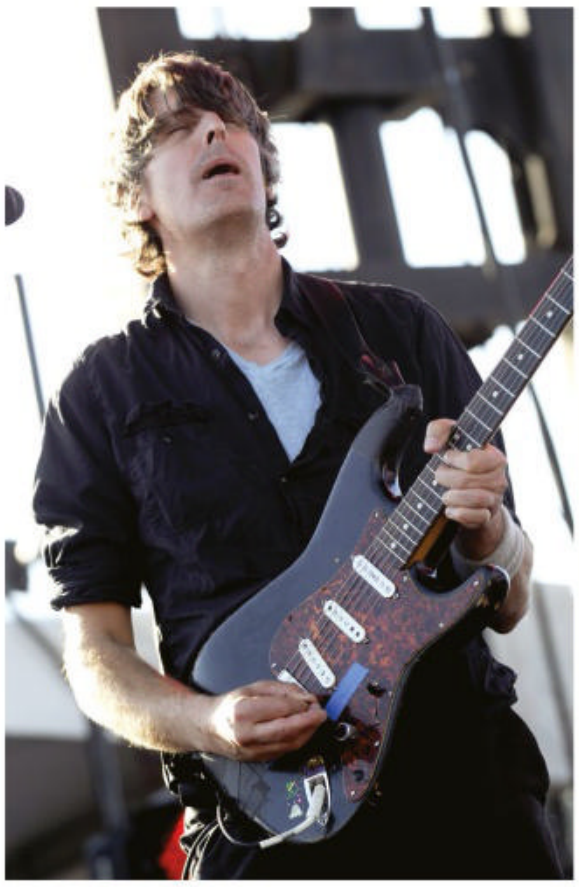
THE STORM AFTER THE CALM.

HIS JARRING GUITAR shrieks, grating leads and anti-solo eruptions were unlike anything else when he showed up as the Pixies' lead guitarist on the late-'80s albums *Come On Pilgrim* and *Surfer Rosa*. Joey Santiago's contribution was a key part of the group's loud-quiet-loud dynamic, adding tension to calm moments that foretold the sonic cataclysm to come. "I wanted to be in a weird band, and I got really lucky when I hooked up with Charles," he says, referring to Pixies frontman and co-guitarist Charles Thompson (a.k.a. Black Francis), whom he met in 1986 while the two attended the University of Massachusetts Amherst. From the start he made it clear he hated guitar solos — though, oddly, he cites Wes Montgomery, Brian May and Elliot

Easton among his heroes. His own playing draws more from the work of another source of inspiration: Jimi Hendrix. "It was all very emotional and intuitive," he says of Hendrix's guitar playing — and his own. "I rely on vibe now. I think it lends more immediacy to what I do."

RECOMMENDED TRACK
"VAMOS" *(SURFER ROSA)*

PETER DOWNING/FILMMAGIC/GETTY IMAGES (SMITH); DAVID CORIO/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES (SHIELDS); XAVI TORRENT/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES (SANTIAGO)



STEPHEN MALKMUS
(PAVEMENT) ▲

APATHY'S JUBILANT SOUNDTRACK MAKER.

STEPHEN MALKMUS WILL always be most associated with the skewed, slacker indie-rock sound he spearheaded with Pavement in the 1990s. The seminal Californian art rockers were the lords of lo-fi, and their abrasive yet tuneful, abstract and ironic humor have cast a long shadow over alternative rock ever since. Central to the group's sound and style was Malkmus's dissonant chords, economical but vibrant melodies — often executed with alternate tunings — and oddball stylings that emphasized personality over skill. Their 1992 studio debut, *Slanted and Enchanted*, remains an alt-rock landmark, but Malkmus has continued his greatness apart from Pavement with his band the Jicks, as a solo artist and as a collaborator with acts like Silver Jews. His latest release, 2020's *Traditional Techniques*, is another left turn, on which he combines 12-string guitar with non-Western instruments from the Balkans, Afghanistan, Nigeria and Persia. "I'm not saying it's traditional music," Malkmus explains, "but we do use some traditional instruments. And maybe we're using them to come up with something new." No surprise there.

RECOMMENDED TRACK
"RATTLED BY THE RUSH" *(WOWEE ZOWEE)*

J MASCIS
(DINOSAUR JR) ▲

THE DYNAMO OF OVERDRIVEN OVERDRIVE.

WITH J MASCIS, it's less about the playing and more about the tone. Everything about it is massive, thick and buzzing with activity, like the wall of a cyclone bearing down on you. Which is not to say Dinosaur Jr's music is impenetrable. Favorites like "Little Fury Things," "Yeah We Know" and "Pond Song," with its pretty fingerpicked riff, ring with a plangent despair that underscores the frustration expressed in their lyrics. "My whole style is just to keep playing," Mascis says, "because I'm playing so loud and with all this fuzz, and if you stop playing it's just insane [*amp*] noise. So I just keep playing to make it sound like something." It must work — Mascis has been welcomed as a guest on tracks by groups ranging from Sonic Youth to the Lemonheads to Cobra Verde to Mike Watt and fIREHOSE, while Dinosaur Jr remains a going concern nearly 40 years on.

RECOMMENDED TRACK
"START CHOPPIN'" *(WHERE YOU BEEN)*

BOB MOULD
(HÜSKER DÜ, SUGAR) ▶

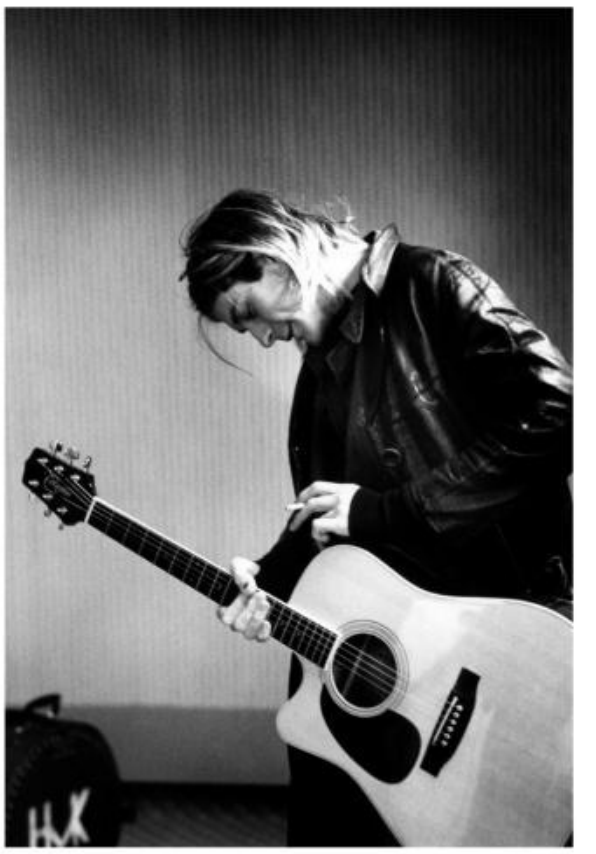
THE PETE TOWNSHEND OF ALT-ROCK.

STARTING OUT AS a fast-and-furious hardcore act, Hüsker Dü crossed over to alternative rock when Bob Mould invested their punk rock with melody, acoustic folk and psychedelia for 1984's *Zen Arcade*. With its ambitious soundscape and rock opera storyline about a young runaway, the album brought a sense of rough-hewn grandeur to the fledgling alt-rock genre. "The '80s was really a special time in music," the guitarist explains. "We all really wanted to change people's ideas of what music could be." Central to Mould's furious guitar tone were Flying V–style guitars, including an Ibanez Rocket Roll Jr., and

an MXR Distortion Plus, which he used to fill every inch of Hüsker Dü's sonic space. "When you're in a three-piece and it's a guitar/bass/drums configuration, everybody has to carry a lot of weight," he says. "We just wanted to create as big a wall of sound as possible." Mould's music would ultimately influence the Pixies, Nirvana and Foo Fighters, while he plowed new sonic territory with Sugar before going solo in 1996.

RECOMMENDED TRACK
"EXPLODE AND MAKE UP" *(SUGAR—FILE UNDER: EASY LISTENING)*

TIM MOSENFELDER/GETTY IMAGES (MALKMUS); MARIANO REGIDOR/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES (MASCIS); RAPHAEL DIAS/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES (MOULD)



KURT COBAIN (NIRVANA)

THE BOY WITH THE THORN IN HIS SIDE.

MUCH HAS BEEN made of Nirvana's timing, mostly how the dive-bombing and strutting hair-metal din that had wailed from L.A. since the second half of the 1980s was decisively silenced by 1991's *Nevermind*. That was a great story for music journalists covering the impact of the band's second album and the emergence of Seattle's grunge scene as a whole at the time. But the deeper truth for many guitar players offers something more than merely pitting subgenres of rock against each other.

For a generation of players, Kurt Cobain emerged as a worldwide star at a crucial point in their development. When you're first coming to grips with the guitar, the sheer enormity of possibilities can be the very thing that drives you away. Kurt's songs offered accessibility for budding guitarists, with an energy and force we could aspire to, and be inspired by. And his intense live performances with bassist Krist Novoselic, drummer Dave Grohl — and later, second guitarist Pat Smear — proved the point.

He was not an overnight sensation. How many guitar players ever are? The instrument takes time and dedication. Kurt served his time, taking the first tentative steps in his bedroom in Aberdeen, Washington with the electric his uncle Chuck had given him for his 14th birthday; taking a month of guitar lessons and learning his first riff (AC/DC's "Back in Black"); and roughing it in a freezing van in North America touring Nirvana's debut, *Bleach*. It was the pursuit of a dream to communicate his music to others.

But misconceptions about his guitar playing remain. Kurt Cobain didn't kill off the solo, and he wasn't guitar's revolutionary anti-hero. Instead, the energy and immediacy of his talent brought an integrity back to the mainstream that cut to the very heart of what makes rock and roll such a visceral force. "His playing was misunderstood," notes Earnie Bailey, the guitar tech who worked closely with Kurt through much of his Nirvana touring career. "He was more advanced than he revealed, and his minimalist playing was more about subtracting the notes and clichés he disliked and working with what's left." That remainder adds up to a compelling legacy. Just as Cobain was inspired by everyone from Buzz Osborne to Ace Frehley and Black Francis, there are countless players he inspired, and there continues to be. Almost 30 years after his passing, that influence resonates as much as every power chord and discordant lead on Nirvana's records.

RECOMMENDED TRACK
"ALL APOLOGIES" *(IN UTERO)*

MICHEL LINSSEN/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

NELS CLINE

(WILCO, NELS CLINE SINGERS, NELS CLINE TRIO, NELS CLINE 4) ▲

TECHNICAL MASTERY IN THE SERVICE OF RAW EXPRESSION.

NELS CLINE IS one of the most daring and creative guitarists working today. Armed with a phalanx of noise-making devices and a finely honed instinct for improvisation, he's pushed back the boundaries of what the guitar is sonically capable of. As well as his fine work with Chicago alt-rockers Wilco, Nels has followed in John Scofield's footsteps as guitarmeister in the pioneering jazz outfit Medeski, Martin & Wood, and worked with countless artists, including Mike Watt and Thurston Moore. Through it all, he's shown an uncanny ability to improvise without descending into jam-band territory. "I think listening is always the key," he says. "Certainly, one needs to have familiarity with the language of music making, or whatever the vocabulary of your instrument is. But beyond that, I think musicians who can play, and have the ability to do what we might call 'deep listening' while they're playing, are capable of coming up with sounds very much like very organized music, but that doesn't stay in one place too long."

RECOMMENDED TRACK "IMPOSSIBLE GERMANY" *(WILCO—SKY BLUE SKY)*

DOUG MARTSCH

(BUILT TO SPILL) ▲

ALT-ROCK'S BALANCING ACT.

KEEP IT LIKE A SECRET, Built to Spill's 1999 album, was their second for a major label. Despite producing zero singles, it remains one of alt-rock's defining guitar albums, stuffed with riffs, arpeggios and solos, each catchier than the last, all of them cascading into each other. "It's ambitious, and I like that about it. But that's also the thing I don't like," says Doug Martsch, Built to Spill's singer, guitarist and sole constant member. "I added a lot of things more to cover up myself than to make it big sounding." Some 20 years later, Martsch aims for the heart of the song when playing *Keep It Like a Secret* live, piecing together a melodic through line from beneath all the swirling layers of fretwork. "There's this balance in music where things need to be conventional, be pleasant to the brain and kind of make sense, but also be challenging," he says. "That's just what you're constantly trying to figure out: what things are cool, and crucial, and what parts take the listener out of the song."

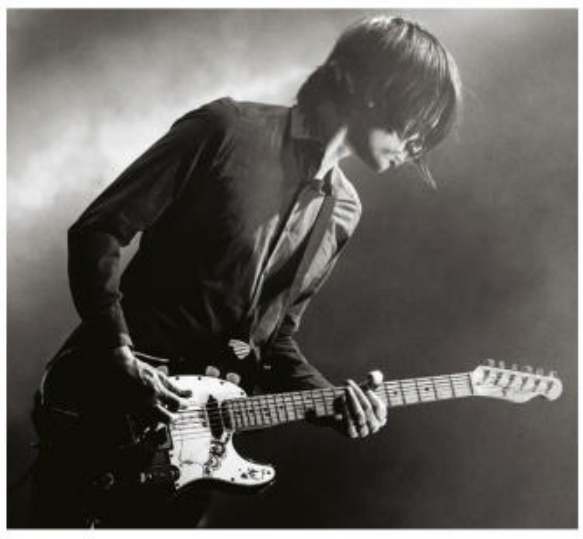
RECOMMENDED TRACK "CARRY THE ZERO" *(KEEP IT LIKE A SECRET)*

JONNY GREENWOOD

(RADIOHEAD) ▶

EVERYTHING IN ITS RIGHT PLACE.

IT'S HARD TO play like Jonny Greenwood and it's even harder to write like him. His parts aren't confined to conventional shapes and patterns, so he produces arresting and unexpected sounds. His most famous four seconds — the percussive stabs before the chorus of "Creep" — began as his attempt to ruin a song he hated and ended up as the track's signature moment. For the rest of his career, he has been similarly fearless about shaking things up. No doubt his approach on guitar is informed by his fluency on other instruments, including piano, viola, drums and the ondes



Martenot, an early synthesizer. Experimenting freely with avant-garde, modern classical and jazz influences, Greenwood either sidesteps clichés or recontextualizes them so they sound fresh again.

RECOMMENDED TRACK "PARANOID ANDROID" (*OK COMPUTER*)

GUITARIST MAGAZINE (CLINE); JORDI VIDAL/REDFERNS VIA GETTY IMAGES (MARTSCH); RICH FURY/GETTY IMAGES (GREENWOOD)

25 GREATEST ALT-ROCK GUITARISTS

JOHN FRUSCIANTE

HE SAVED THE RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS. BUT FIRST HE HAD TO SAVE HIMSELF.

ON JUNE 14, 1998, the prodigal son came home. When the Red Hot Chili Peppers walked onstage at the Tibetan Freedom Concert at Washington DC's RFK Stadium, it was with guitarist John Frusciante, the man who had deserted them mid-tour six years earlier and spent the ensuing period in a full-blown drug hell.

It was Frusciante's highest-profile appearance since reconnecting with his estranged bandmates earlier that year. But this was more than a reunion: It signified the return of man who had journeyed to the brink of death.

The band played just three songs that night: "Give It Away," "Under the Bridge" and "The Power of Equality." But the truncated setlist didn't matter. What mattered was that the band and Frusciante had emerged from a decade of drama intact. The Red Hot Chili Peppers were whole again.

John Frusciante was 18 years old when he played his first gig with the Chili Peppers, in November 1988. His new bandmates were barely a decade older, but it felt like they'd lived many more lives than he had. Singer Anthony Kiedis and bassist Flea had formed the band with guitarist Hillel Slovak and drummer Jack Irons in 1983. They were the ultimate good-time party band, the exuberance of their songs mirrored by the chaos of their lifestyle. But the good times screeched to a halt in June 1988, when Slovak died of an overdose at the age of 26.

(from left) Anthony Kiedis, Flea and John Frusciante, November 30, 2000

Frusciante was his obvious replacement. He had discovered the Chili Peppers when he was 15 and was a regular at their L.A. club gigs. He knew their songs inside out and aced his audition. "I realized that I wanted to be a rock star, do drugs and get girls," Frusciante told *Guitar Player*.

He joined a band who were still grieving and, in Kiedis's case, wrestling

"IN A WAY, WE'RE ALL CO-DEPENDENT AND WE KNOW IT, BUT WE ALSO TRUST EACH OTHER"

with demons. Despite his own hedonistic ambitions, the teenage Frusciante barely even smoked pot, prompting his new bandmates to nickname him Greenie.

The Chili Peppers' first album with Frusciante, 1989's *Mother's Milk*, was their most successful yet, selling 500,000 copies in the U.S. But it was 1991's Rick Rubin–produced *BloodSugarSexMagik*, that turned them into superstars. It was a measure of their success that both Nirvana and Pearl Jam opened for them in late 1991.

Yet, as record sales rose and shows got bigger, Frusciante found himself struggling with the scale of the band's fame. "John would say, 'We're too popular, I don't need to be at this level of success, I would just be proud to be playing this music in clubs like you guys were doing two years ago,'" Kiedis wrote in his book, *Scar Tissue*, adding that they would get into heated arguments backstage.

Frusciante's fragile state of mind wasn't helped by his chemical intake. The toxic combination of drugs, fractured interpersonal relationships, and the pressure of being in a hugely successful band impacted his mental health. The snapping point came in summer 1992. As the band flew to Japan for a series of shows, the guitarist started to hear voices in his head: "You won't make it through the tour. You have to go now."

That's precisely what he did. On May 7, 1992, just after playing a show in the city of Saitama, Frusciante walked out on the Red Hot Chili Peppers mid-tour, flew back to America and disappeared into a black hole of his own creation.

Over the next six years, the guitarist hovered between life and death. He holed up in a house in the Hollywood Hills, walling himself off from his former life. His waking hours were divided between snorting, smoking or shooting up and dazed artistic endeavors — painting, writing short stories, making lo-fi four-track recordings. In 1994, he released his debut solo album, *Niandra LaDes and Usually Just a T-Shirt*. Its skeletal, half-there song sketches were a world away from the Chili Peppers' taut funk-rock gymnastics and a reflection of the guitarist's precarious physical and mental state. It sold just 15,000 copies. But that was exactly what Frusciante wanted.

As the 1990s progressed, his life got even darker. His house in the Hollywood Hills burnt down in 1996, destroying several guitars and tapes of the music he was working on. In 1997, he released a second solo album, *Smile From the Streets You Hold*, a record that Frusciante later

SCOTT GRIES/GETTY IMAGES

claimed he made purely for "drug money." "I had no image to care about or present to anyone," he told *Alt Press*. "I wasn't ashamed… I was as close to dying as a person could be."

Frusciante's sudden departure had left a hole that his former bandmates struggled to fill. A seemingly permanent solution was found with Dave Navarro, but the union didn't quite deliver on its promise. Their sole album together, 1995's *One Hot Minute*, was solid rather than spectacular. Navarro's psychedelic heavy rock style wasn't a great fit for the band's groove-centred approach. It didn't help that both Navarro and Kiedis were falling back into bad old ways. "We both had a loose grip on reality," the guitarist later admitted. Whether the reasons were musical or chemical, the partnership between the Chilis and Navarro officially dissolved in 1998.

It was Flea who suggested they call Frusciante. The guitarist had begun hearing voices again, except this time they told him he would die if he didn't quit drugs. Frusciante listened to them, checking himself into rehab that January to clean up and save himself.

Kiedis was skeptical about getting his former bandmate back, but Flea dug in. The bassist said he would quit the band if they didn't at least call him.

"When Dave left, Flea called me up and asked me what I thought about playing with John," the singer told *Kerrang!* "I told him it would be a dream, but that it was a very far-fetched concept. Then a week later we were playing together."

Things moved fast. Within three months of a "bombastic" — Kiedis's words — rehearsal, the Red Hot Chili Peppers were onstage at the Tibetan Freedom Concert in Washington, D.C. with Frusciante. Soon, they were creating their first album with the guitarist since *BloodSugarSexMagik*. Released in 1999, *Californication* felt less like the work of a band picking up where they'd left off almost a decade earlier, and more like the start of an entirely new chapter. It didn't ditch the funk rock of the past so much as hone it into something mature and intelligent.

Frusciante onstage at Coachella in 2007

KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

"Around the World" and "Parallel Universe" ramped up the energy, but the slower songs — "Scar Tissue," "Otherside" and the title track, with its acute dissection of the California state of mind — showed a more thoughtful, measured side to the band. The album would go on to sell more than 15 million copies worldwide — more even than *BloodSugarSexMagik*.

But the record's real triumph was that it saved the Chili Peppers. "Until John rejoined, Flea was at the end of his Chili Peppers rope," Kiedis said. More importantly, as Frusciante acknowledged, it signified his own return from a journey that was sure to end in tragedy.

"It's a second chance for all of us," he told NYRock. "In a way, we're all co-dependent and we know it, but we also trust each other."

The guitarist bailed on the band for a second time in 2009 to pursue his solo career. But it was more amicable this time. Frusciante even recommended his own understudy, Josh Klinghoffer, as his replacement.

Yet even that wasn't the end of the story. In 2019, Frusciante returned to the band, displacing Klinghoffer. "It's just returning to family," he said in 2021. "I'm extremely comfortable with those people. It was as if no time at all had gone by." — *Dave Everley*

25 GREATEST ALT-ROCK GUITARISTS

BRIAN AUBERT (SILVERSUN PICKUPS) ▼

CARRYING THE TORCH FOR GRUNGE ROCK.

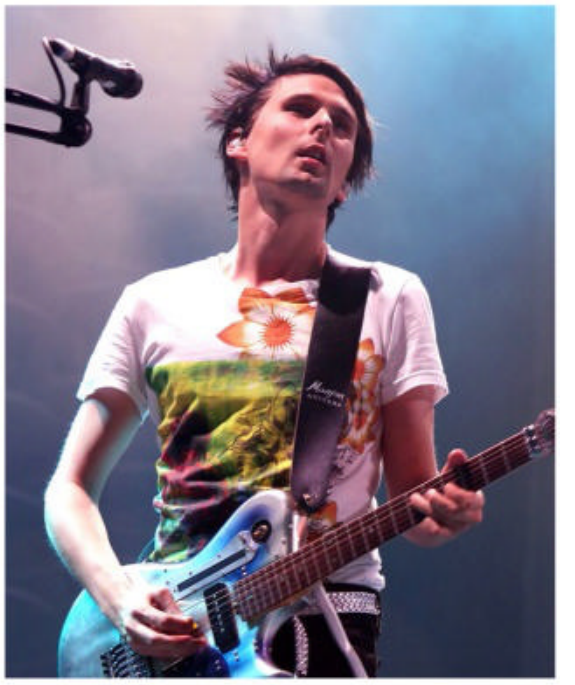
THE HEYDAY OF grunge may be 30 years in the past, but the genre lives on in spirit and sound in Silversun Pickups. The L.A. quartet formed in 2000 as the sun set on alt-rock's greatest commercial era, and then went on to revive the genre with their 2006 smash hit, "Lazy Eye." From guitarist Brian Aubert's superfuzzy guitar tone to bassist Nikki Monninger, Silversun Pickups might bring to mind the Smashing Pumpkins — they even recorded 2019's *Widow's Weeds* with *Siamese Dream* producer Butch Vig — but their influences go back much further. "I always think that because Sonic Youth and My Bloody Valentine exist, we are not weird," Aubert said during their early brush with fame, in 2007. "We're a pop band because of them." Like Kevin Shields, Aubert imbues the band's music with an atmosphere of psychedelic melodies and classic punk-influenced riffage delivered on a wave of fuzzy, textural guitars — typically an Epiphone Sheraton — through a battalion of effects pedals. "I and the rest of the band do like it when the guitar is used as a texture and less as a guitar in itself," Aubert explained. "We like making the guitar sound like a keyboard a lot of the times."

RECOMMENDED TRACK
"PANIC SWITCH" *(SWOON)*

MATT BELLAMY (MUSE) ▶

TECH-SAVVY FRONTMAN FOR ONE OF THE WORLD'S BIGGEST ROCK BANDS.

YOU KNOW YOU'RE onto something when Brian May is among your fans. The Queen guitarist has called U.K alt-rockers Muse "extraordinary musicians" who "let their madness show through." Both descriptions fit guitarist Matt Bellamy, who is famous for his tech-loaded, forward-thinking approach to the electric guitar. His Manson guitars have features like the Roland GK MIDI pickup system, built-in effects pedals, LED lights, Fernandes Sustainer pickups, ribbon MIDI controllers, Kaoss pad controllers and plenty more. Despite the high-tech sonic influences, Bellamy's love of traditional classical music permeates Muse's music. That said, he acknowledges that alt-rock's landscape has changed dramatically from the group's 1990's heyday. But he can cope just fine. "The guitar has become a textural instrument rather than a lead instrument," he told the BBC in 2018. "And I think that's probably a good thing."



RECOMMENDED TRACK
"PLUG IN BABY" (*ORIGIN OF SYMMETRY*)

GRAHAM COXON (BLUR) ▶

RULE BREAKER. RISK TAKER.

AS THE SHY, unassuming guitarist for Blur in the 1990s, Graham Coxon imbued the group's Brit pop with urgent riffs, glorious leads and hooks that other guitarists would gladly hang entire careers from. Playing mostly Telecasters through Marshalls, he uses distortion devastatingly, yet somehow never sounds the same. Like a shapeshifting wizard, he gives the music exactly what it needs. Though his work with Blur alone would place him on this list, he's shown greater diversity in his solo career, where he's explored lo-fi punk, power pop and even Albion folk. His playing has earned him raves from producers like Stephen Street, the former knob twiddler for the Smiths who called Johnny Marr and Coxon "among the best guitarists in the world." Coxon holds a more modest opinion of his talents. "I think I'm more in the free-jazz world when it comes to lead playing, and I play physically. I like the sound of a guitar being thumped. I'd hear other people making rock albums that sounded really polished, but my records always sound like me: slightly shambolic and about to break. I cover my lack of technical ability with weird noises."

RECOMMENDED TRACK
"COFFEE & TV"*(13)*

KEVIN WINTER/GETTY IMAGES FOR IHEARTMEDIA (AUBERT); GREETSIA TENT/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES (BELLAMY); JOBY SESSIONS (COXON)

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25 GREATEST ALT-ROCK GUITARISTS

FIRE DOWN BELOW

Armed with just his phone and extensive network of musical cohorts, **Tom Morello** takes the electric guitar into uncharted territory on *The Atlas Underground Fire.*

BY JOE BOSSO

WHEN RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE were forced to reschedule their 2020 reunion tour to 2021 — and then to 2022 — Tom Morello found himself at home for the longest sustained period of his adult life. While dealing with family demands, the guitarist also experienced something he had encountered before: a seemingly incurable case of writer's block. "It was a drought in my head, like, 'I've got nothing,'" he says. "For the first four months or so, I was completely uninspired."

A breakthrough came from an unlikely source, however, when Morello read a Kanye West interview in which the rapper boasted about recording vocals for a new album straight to his iPhone. Taking the same approach, Morello set his phone on a folding chair in front of a Marshall half-stack, started playing riffs and assorted noises, and before he knew it, the spark of creativity had returned. "It sounded great," he says. "I began sending these riffs and licks to producers and artists around the world, and that was the genesis for my new record."

The Atlas Underground Fire (Mom+Pop Music) is Morello's follow-up to his 2018 solo album, *The Atlas Underground,* and like that set it's a collaborative affair, only this time all the recordings were done remotely (the only exception being a 2014 live version of "Highway to Hell" recorded in

Australia and featuring Bruce Springsteen and Eddie Vedder). Its diverse mix of guest artists includes Bring Me the Horizon, Chris Stapleton, Phantogram, Damian Marley, Sama' Abdulhadi and others, with a range of musical styles that incorporates blazing rock, transfixing dream pop, modern country, crushing EDM and more.

Morello's daredevil, transcendent approach to guitar playing is as fierce as ever. The album brims with superhero riffs, hellfire shredding and all sorts of sonic wackiness, and he maintains that he hasn't even begun to unlock the instrument's potential. "I firmly believe that the electric guitar has a future, not just a past," he says. "And that future is going to require thinking outside of the box and not just retreading the same old ground hoping for different results.

"That's why on these Atlas Underground records I really look to try to forge an alloy between my Marshall stack, big riffs, crazy guitar sounds and futuristic bass drops. The idea is that the electric guitar has a lot of room to grow, and I'm trying to prove it on this record."

Even though you hold the position that there's still so much to do on the guitar, are you sometimes surprised by how many players tend to be traditionalists? Do you feel like they're stuck in one lane?

I don't know if it's so much being stuck in a lane. It's really just loving the tradition of the instrument. There's absolutely nothing wrong with that, and they should enjoy it. For me, the excitement comes not from just hearing familiar sounds but also from creating sounds previously unknown to mankind.

I spent my first, whatever, 10 years of being a musician learning the Eddie Van Halen and Randy Rhoads solos. I did my 10,000 hours of chromatic scales. It was really at the onset of Rage Against the Machine when I started self-identifying as the DJ in the band and started looking at the instrument in different ways, trying to forge a unique, artistic vocabulary on a tried-and-true instrument.

At first, did you have producers and engineers tapping your wrist — "We don't do that." I imagine it was fun for you to upset the apple cart.

That is absolutely correct. The first record I made prior to Rage Against the Machine was with a band called Lock Up. I remember I was just in the fledgling stages of figuring out stuff to do with the toggle switch, and the producer hated it. He was like, "That's getting in the way of the guitar solo." And I thought, Maybe that is the guitar solo. There was an internal voice telling me to follow my dreams, but there was this external voice saying, "Crush those dreams in the nest."

On the new album, you recorded your guitars to your phone. You hadn't done that before?

Maybe with voicemails, to keep track of ideas, but the idea that "this is the take that's going on the record" never occurred to me. I've got to thank Kanye for that.

Obviously, there were sonic limitations to that approach, but it seems as if you embraced them and used them to your advantage.

Exactly. I mean, listen to the record — those guitars sound like kick-ass electric guitars. The one thing I liked about the process was how it changed the whole creative formula. Rather than there being four guys in a room looking at each other writing a song, it was me alone every day with my phone going, "What's the plan for today?" It may be an F-sharp day. It may be a drop-D day or a crazy R2D2 noises day.

You do get some incredible sounds on your phone recordings. Your track with Damian Marley, "The Achilles List," is a real speaker ripper.

[*laughs*] Yeah, yeah. There was no science to the process. I remember once my engineer and producer friend Carl [*Restivo*], who I was sending stuff to, he was like, "Could you just move the phone back a few inches?" I'm like, "I'll try to remember that tomorrow, man."

How did your version of "Highway to Hell" with Bruce Springsteen and Eddie Vedder come about?

I was on tour with the E Street Band in Australia, filling in for Steve Van Zandt, and we were in Perth, the birthplace of Bon Scott. I was going to pay my respects to his grave in the Perth Cemetery. It was nighttime, and I couldn't find his grave — there are no eternal flames burning. From out of the distance comes this motorbike, and there was this heavyset dude with a German World War II helmet on and a T-shirt that read "I Don't Give a Shit, But If I Did, You're the One I'd Give It To." I'm like, "That guy's going to know where Bon Scott's grave is." [*laughs*]

Sure enough, he led me right there. I paid my respects, went back to the hotel bar and saw Bruce Springsteen. I said, "Do you think there's any way that the circle of the E Street Band and the circle of AC/DC might overlap?" And he was like, "Never thought about that before," but he went upstairs and thought about it. We began rehearsing "Highway to Hell" at soundchecks, and then we found ourselves in this huge Melbourne soccer stadium with 80,000 people. Eddie Vedder happened to be at the show; he came down to see Bruce.

A lightbulb went off. I knocked on Bruce's dressing room door and said, "We're in Australia, where AC/DC is king, where 'Highway to Hell' is the unofficial national anthem of rock and roll liberation. What if we open the show with 'Highway to Hell' with Eddie Vedder?" And he was like, "That sounds like a pretty good idea." We did it, and it was an apex moment in the history of live rock and roll.

"I FIRMLY BELIEVE THAT THE ELECTRIC GUITAR HAS A FUTURE, NOT JUST A PAST"

Are you surprised that Bruce isn't given his due as a guitar player? He's a phenomenal guitarist.

A great guitar player. I would single out *Darkness on the Edge of Town* as some of my favorite guitar work. Tone, feeling, melodic choice. It's one of my favorite guitar records. It was awesome doing guitar duels with Bruce. I had to learn 250 songs before going on tour with him, and we played songs outside of that. It can be a song he played in a bar in 1972. Just off top of his head knows it. He's a human jukebox.

Your track with Phantogram, "Driving to Texas," is gorgeous. Not many people would picture you fitting into what we call "dream pop."

I worked with Josh from Phantogram on a song on the last Atlas Underground record. He and Sarah, his partner in Phantogram, reached out and wanted to do a song this past year. I was like, "I would love to." I love their production and their sort haunting, left-of-center, spooky vibe — "Where's that going to take my guitar playing?" It took it in this kind of crazy, ethereal place. The solo at the end feels like this avenging angel

"THE IDEA THAT 'THIS IS THE TAKE' NEVER OCCURRED TO ME. I'VE GOT TO THANK KANYE FOR THAT"

coming down to pass judgment on the protagonist one way or the other.

Your track with Chris Stapleton sounds like taking Dylan into the 21st century. You mix these wild, spacey guitar sounds with country...
Chris is a great guy. I met him at the Chris Cornell Memorial show. We got on a Zoom call to write a song together. He's in Nashville, I'm here, and we just spent the first two hours talking about what it's like trying to keep the grandmas alive and keep the kids from going crazy. That therapeutic conversation became the basis for "The War Inside." He reminds me of Chris Cornell in a number of ways. He has this effortless ability to craft great melody out of thin air.

You've talked about your "misfit toys" guitar collection. Did some of them make it onto this album?
Absolutely. Each day I would pick one of those misfit toys, bring it down and maybe randomly decide, We're going to use a delay and my $50 Kay guitar today. Then I'd just see what comes out, and who does that get sent to? The Arm the Homeless guitar is all over it. The drop-D Tele is on it. So is my $50 Kay, my first guitar ever. It's loud and proud on the record. The Audioslave guitar, which used to be the Budweiser guitar until I burned off the lacquer, that makes an appearance. The Jimmy Page double-neck is on there, although I only used the six-string part. The baritone guitar I used for "Hold the Line" with Grandson [*the pseudonym of Canadian-American Jordan Benjamin*]. Most of the solos are played with the Arm the Homeless guitar, and then the rhythm tracks were just on whatever guitar I happened to choose on that day.

A lot of guitarists dream of owning '59 sunbursts and the like. You don't seem like you were ever that guy.
I'm not that guy at all. I will tell you, when making records with Brendan O'Brien in the past, because he is that guy, he would bring stuff from his studio and I would always be like, "It's just a frigging Stratocaster, dude." But then I'd think, "It actually does sound super good." [*laughs*] If you like super good.

I spoke with Alex Lifeson recently, and he told me that you had invited both him and Kirk Hammett to perform on one of your new tracks. I assumed it would be on this album.
It's a great song, and it will most definitely see the light of day. I ran into Kirk at a non-rock-and-roll-related event, and we hadn't seen each other in years. I got to thinking, Wouldn't it be awesome to do something? I thought about who would be the third member of that triangle, and then I thought about Alex Lifeson, who is one of my favorite guitar players. So I reached out to him. It's full-on head-cutting.

Given the times we live in, are you planning to return to your protest singer alter ego, the Nightwatchman?
At some point in the future, the Nightwatchman will rear his head. Right now, this process has been so liberating, and it's been a life raft of hope during a time of anxiety. I've been in the bunker making these songs, and now at last people get to hear it. There may not be a 200-city tour behind this record, but knowing that it's out there in the world, this was like a North Star that helped guide me through a very troubled time. The act of writing and recording isn't just about creating music, but it's also an act of self-creation. Re-creation.

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AUTHENTIC HENDRIX

PRS PAUL REED SMITH GUITARS

ST. VINCENT

RESHAPING GUITAR IN FORM AND FUNCTION.

ANNIE CLARK IS perhaps the most beguiling guitarist to emerge in the past 20 years. The artist known as St. Vincent makes music that is a collision of adept, otherworldly guitar arrangements and propulsive electronica, a mix that has made her a leading light of the alt-rock movement's genre-subverting strain.

A Berklee grad inspired to learn guitar by grunge acts like Nirvana and Soundgarden, Clark debuted her genre-bending approach on 2007's *Marry Me*, kicking off a career that has had its fair share of success and critical acclaim. Her 2014 *St. Vincent* brought her a Grammy Award for Best Alternative Album (the first won by a solo female artist in 20 years). She seems poised to repeat that with her latest release, 2021's *Daddy's Home*. The Grammy-nominated album was recorded partly during lockdown and made with no expectations. "It was truly just having so much fun playing music," Clark says. "I'd go in and sing a song in my studio, just for fun, just, 'Oh, I wonder how my voice is going to sound today,' and the same with putting guitar parts down, just playing for fun and joy. That's emblematic of the whole process.

"It's not that any record is easy to make, because it's not," she adds. "But a lot of times the strife in the process is you getting in your own way and not some literal external force. It's the ego games and self-loathing circus that gets in the way."

That sort of effortlessness seems a hallmark of Clark's career, including the creation of her Ernie Ball signature guitar. After visiting the company's factory in spring 2015, she recalls, "I sat down with Sterling [*Ball*] and he said, 'Why don't you design a guitar?' Really, the guitar that I drew up on that first day is very similar to what ended up making the final cut. There were definitely tweaks back and forth to make sure the ergonomics were correct — the balance was correct, to whittle down as much of the weight as possible without sacrificing the tone. I couldn't believe that it was that easy. And with my vision and their skills combined, I think we made a really great guitar."

Your music is diverse. How often are guitar parts the starting point for compositions?

Quite a lot of times. Melody, to me, is everything, and there are a lot of melodies that I dream up and transpose onto guitar that end up being riffs. At the moment, I can only really speak of my current writing process, but it's very guitar-heavy. My emotional spectrum on the instrument has gotten broader.

You play with a lot of dynamism. You're up and down the fretboard with quite a percussive approach. Do you make a conscious effort not to play guitaristic clichés or is it just your voice on guitar? How did your style crystalize?

I do try to shy away from the pitfalls of the poorly played blues guitar. I think, too, approaching the guitar from a melodic standpoint as a jumping-off point instead of relying solely on muscle memory — this might feel fun to play, but how does it sound? The ear and the heart are king. It's fun to riff on the classic stuff that every guitar player knows, but I get away from that in particular because there is John Lee Hooker and there is Howlin' Wolf, and I don't think that that's where I need to add to the conversation.

The revered guitarist Tuck Andress is a relative of yours. Was he an early influence and, if so, what's so interesting about him as a player that you admire?

Tuck's my uncle and his influence on me is immense. I flatter myself to think that there is an actual genetic through-line to our playing — I mean, we're obviously related and there are all manner of micro-movements that we might share. Tuck's a total genius and he can make an instrument sound like 10 people playing. The level of skill and discipline it took for him to become a one-man guitar symphony is staggering. I've never seen anybody play like he can play. He's the eighth wonder of the world.

Tuck and Patti [*his wife*] took me out on tour with them when I was 15 years old, to Japan, and to be a 15-year-old kid from Tulsa growing up in Dallas, all of a sudden being in Japan, being their tour manager-slash-roadie, I got to see what it really meant to be a touring musician. And I got to see how much their show moved the audience, myself included, and it encouraged me to fall so deeply in love with music. I did, and it's never, ever let me down. It's just the best thing.

— Interview by David Mead & Jamie Dickson

RECOMMENDED TRACK
"CHLOE IN THE AFTERNOON"
(STRANGE MERCY)

EMMA MCINTYRE/GETTY IMAGES)

JOHN SHEARER/GETTY IMAGES

JACK WHITE

FROM BLUES CRUSADER TO ALT-ROCK OBSESSIVE.

AS THE DRIVING force behind the White Stripes, White rebooted the blues for the post-grunge era. The ethos was simple: Take drummer Meg's kit, one beat-up amplifier and a barely in-tune guitar, and let it rip. The group's thudding mix of blues, punk and metal ("I don't trust anybody who doesn't like Led Zeppelin," White once declared) laid the groundwork for his eclectic career. Since the Stripes parted ways, he's branched out with the more pop-oriented Raconteurs and the goth-blues supergroup the Dead Weather, as well as with his own solo releases. His life and work remain heavy with dizzying musical ideas, all of which he undertakes and performs with a passion that draws his audience to his obsession. "There aren't that many things left that haven't already been done, especially with music," he explains. "I'm interested in ideas that can shake us all up."

RECOMMENDED TRACK "BALL AND BISCUIT" *(WHITE STRIPES—ELEPHANT)*

MICK HUTSON/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

(from left) Nick Valensi, Julian Casablancas and Albert Hammond Jr.

ALBERT HAMMOND JR. AND NICK VALENSI (THE STROKES)

A POTENT PAIRING THAT LAUNCHED A THOUSAND COPYCAT BANDS.

TWENTY YEARS HAVE passed since the Strokes released their debut, *This Is It*, so it's easy to forget the album's impact on alternative rock and guitar tone. As the Strokes' guitar tandem, Albert Hammond Jr. and Nick Valensi blur the lines between rhythm and lead with their angular playing and twin single-note lines. Valensi has favored hollowbody electrics like the Epiphone Riviera, while Hammond prefers his 1985 '70s-reissue Fender Stratocaster in Olympic White. These went into a minimalist setup involving Fender DeVille combos, played loud with a little breakup. Played without accompaniment, such brightness would be pure ice pick, but as a complement to Julian Casablancas's slightly nasal, kinda over it vocal delivery, it has proven exquisite. At once they were referencing the treble-forward jangle of classic American indie and garage rock, and yet they sounded so fresh, proving that it is hard to sound stale when you put so much treble in your guitar sound.

RECOMMENDED TRACK "THE ADULTS ARE TALKING" *(THE NEW ABNORMAL)*

PAUL BERGEN/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

KURT VILE

LUSCIOUSLY LAID-BACK AND LO-FI.

KURT VILE'S TRACKS shimmer with layers of acoustic and heavily effected electric guitars, a sonically rich and occasionally hazy soundscape that provides a warm, engulfing backdrop to his laconic vocal delivery. Listen closely, though, and you'll hear plenty of engaging guitar melodies that could carry his songs all on their own. "I like blues licks and melodic folk-tinged riffs," Vile told *GP* in December 2018. "They've got to be melodic, a little bit pretty, but with the blues in there. I like to make them as hypnotic and as melodic as possible. I get lost in most of the riffs that I find myself coming back to." And unlike nearly everyone on this list, Vile makes acoustic guitars the heart of his alt-rock approach. "If I had to pick a main tool, it would be the acoustic guitar," he says. "In fact, certain electric guitars that I fall in love with, I won't plug them in for days after I get them. I'll just sit on the couch and listen to how they sound acoustically and how they feel. I like the idea of hearing all the nuances. Acoustically, you can't beat that."

RECOMMENDED TRACK "WAKIN ON A PRETTY DAY" *(WAKIN ON A PRETTY DAZE)*

TIME IS ON HER SIDE

Stripping away the heavy rock guitars of her previous albums, **Courtney Barnett** makes a fresh start with *Things Take Time, Take Time.*

BY NIKKI O'NEILL

PHOTOGRAPH BY LINDSEY BYRNES

TWO DECADES AFTER Kurt Cobain redefined mainstream rock with his raw, uncompromising songwriting and anti-guitar hero way of playing guitar, a left-handed guitarist and art school student in Hobart, Australia, took inspiration from his example. Courtney Barnett knew the rock music of several eras, thanks to a neighbor's mixtapes, and her own modest CD collection consisted mainly of Nirvana albums. While playing right-handed guitars upside down at first (due to the unavailability of good lefty guitars), she developed a unique way of playing rhythm and lead with her thumb and fingers, since she didn't like the sound of a pick against the strings.

By the early 2010s, Barnett was playing in bands and appearing as a co-writer and guitarist on recordings by local singer-songwriters. After a stint as a slide guitarist and co-lead singer in the psych-country-folk group Immigrant Union (you can hear her on their sophomore album, *Anyway*), Barnett released her debut EP, *I've Got a Friend Called Emily Ferris* in 2012 on Milk! Records, a label she cofounded with fellow artist and then-partner Jen Cloher.

The 34-year-old's widely eclectic take on indie rock can be gleaned from a playlist of influential songs she curated for a streaming service for many years following those first band experiences. Her selections show a wide tapestry of musical input, ranging from her parents' favorite jazz singers to the '90s bands of her generation, like the Lemonheads, EMF, Pavement and the Breeders, as well as Jimi Hendrix, Yoko Ono, PJ Harvey, Leonard Cohen, Sonic Youth, Neil Young, Joni Mitchell, Patti Smith and Sharon Jones & the Dap-Kings.

Barnett signed with Marathon Artists in 2013 and combined her first EP with a new collection of songs as *The Double EP: A Sea of Split Peas*. Momentum quickly built. The international music press picked different tracks as their "favorite of the week," while Barnett got booked on American late-night TV shows and landed a slot at the Coachella festival. Her 2015 debut album, *Sometimes I Sit and Think, and Sometimes I Just Sit*, became her commercial breakthrough and was lauded as a rock — not indie-rock — classic. Her infectious songs were a meeting of uncompromising noise rock and American roots music, combining an exhilarating mix of sharp stream-of-consciousness lyrics and humor, delivered in an instantly recognizable half-singing vocal that sometimes recalls Lou Reed. The album was accompanied by a series of fun music videos that revealed a self-deprecating artist who also played many of the album's fills and solos on her black Telecaster. You don't see that too often, and people welcomed her with fervor.

"ONE OF MY SAFETY FALLBACKS WAS TO USE A LOT OF DISTORTION PEDAL. WHEN IN DOUBT, JUST MAKE A BIG NOISE"

It's not hard to grasp what intense adulation can do to a person who suffers from anxiety and depression, as well as to their art, where it can be tempting to keep giving the audience the musical identity that they love, but that you are starting to outgrow. And so Barnett started to expand her ways of expression on her 2018 follow-up, *Tell Me How You Really Feel*.

This new direction is also noticeable on her new album, *Things Take Time, Take Time*, a lockdown memento born of change and calamity. Barnett was struggling following her breakup with Cloher, the pandemic lockdown and the terrifying Australian bushfires of 2019–2020, known colloquially as the Black Summer. When a friend suggested she make a list of what she looked forward to, Barnett gave it a try, focusing on small things: a cup of coffee, sunrise. That, in turn, gave birth to the songs on *Things Take Time, Take Time*, a collection of sprawling songs built from the minutiae of everyday things. To record it,

MARK METCALFE/GETTY IMAGES

Barnett chose a studio that was new to her — Golden Retriever in Sydney — and worked without her usual gear or her band featuring bassist Bones Slone, drummer Dave Mudie and guitarist Dan Luscombe. Instead, she created and coproduced the record with Warpaint drummer Stella Mozgawa, who had previously performed on Barnett's 2017 collaboration with guitarist Kurt Vile, *Lotta Sea Lice*.

"Maybe that was a subconscious effort to push myself out of my comfort zones and try something different," Barnett says of her decision to work amid so many changes. "I wanted to work with Stella again, and the timing was perfect because both of us were in the same country. If the pandemic hadn't been there, we would've been busy with our other projects."

Onstage during Splendour in the Grass 2016, in Byron Bay, Australia, July 24, 2016

The time is ripe for Barnett to enjoy a resurgence. Her new tour will see her play New York City's Radio City Music Hall, and she's the subject of director Danny Cohen's brand-new documentary, *Anonymous Club*, which offers insights into the creative process and struggles of an artist Cohen refers to as an anti-influencer, a recluse acclaimed by audiences, and a strong female performer in conflict with herself. We spoke to Barnett in Los Angeles, as she was kicking off her U.S. tour together with Sloane and Mozgawa.

Your songs feature a lot of influences from rock, blues, country and folk, but you often give these familiar elements unexpected twists. I'm thinking of [*the 2019 single*] "Everybody Hates You," which sounds like a classic blues-rock tune until you play this twitchy and deranged tremolo-bar solo. Is surprise an important component to your music?

Not so much trying to surprise other people, but I think embracing the spontaneity. I've often gotten the majority of the song ready, where I know what it's gonna do, but there are always bits that I don't have planned. Normally it's things like guitar solos. A lot of the time, I leave them until the last minute to see what happens. Often, it's that first thing you do that ends up being the best one. And every time I try to overdub a better guitar part or solo, it never has that same energy. I think that's what I try to capture; sometimes that's what that slightly deranged thing is. There might be wrong notes and small things that

Shooting the video for "Nobody Really Cares If You Don't Go to the Party" outside Camden Town Station, in London, August 17, 2015

aren't completely right, but it captures a certain energy, and I try to trust that first-thought mentality.

"Small Poppies" [*from* Sometimes I Sit...] is a great song filled with beautiful '50s retro guitar references, even though they also have that twist.
That is actually my friend Dan Luscombe who played on the song. I played pretty minimal rhythm guitar on it. Dan played on my first few albums, and I listened to that song the other day. His guitar playing on it is so incredible. But after I finished that album and was ready to go on tour, I found out that he couldn't join me, so I had to learn all of his amazing parts and all these different skills. It really pushed me as a guitar player, and I find him to be really inspiring.

How did you develop your playing style? Were there any influences, choices, or decisions on what not to do? I'm thinking of St. Vincent, who once said in an interview that she really tries to avoid playing "muscle memory licks."
It's hard to see what my own style is, because it's what I know and what I've figured out over the years. The muscle memory comment is a really good one, because I think it's easy to fall into that comfort zone. I guess I try to keep myself on the edge of it, so that I'm not too comfortable but always learning new things. Part of my style is playing rhythm and lead at the same time. I was 18 when I started my solo career shows; I played acoustic and had to bridge this gap between rhythm and lead guitar. Over the years, as I started bands, I always tried to get a second guitarist to do the lead bits, but I've played as a three-piece for so much of my musical career that I had to learn how to blend the two out of necessity.

How would you describe your guitar aesthetic?
I would probably avoid doing that. It's a combination of lots of ideas and trying to find the perfect blend of everything.

On *Things Take Time, Take Time*, you've moved away from the rock songs with punchy hooks and the feedback-driven solos that made your debut album a huge hit with fans and critics. This work is a lot more low-key, with a warm and comforting sound palette that mirrors the ruminating lyrics you've written. What brought about this new direction?
Over years of playing live, I've recognized that one of my safety fallbacks was to use a lot of distortion pedals: When in doubt, just make a big noise. And I recognized that it started to feel a little bit lazy and

ANDREW BENGE/GC IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES

repetitive. Obviously, it's fun to do that, and a lot of the songs called for it. But — thinking of that thing St. Vincent said — I was looking for different angles: different ways to show emotions and find dynamics in the songs. It's easy to rely on the same tricks in songwriting or in the studio. I wasn't trying to change patterns completely but just be aware when something came up that felt familiar and try a different way.

How did you and Stella work out the song arrangements?
For this album, we tried to use different instruments, and when things were sounding familiar or just a bit same-same, we would mix them up. I only took one electric guitar into the studio, my sunburst Fender Jag [*Kurt Cobain model with stock pickups*]. I always get the best sounds out of that guitar. I also used a lot of acoustic guitar [*a custom Maton*] to thicken up guitar parts. But a couple of times, we'd work on a song that sounded like it had too much guitar, and so I'd take the guitar totally out of it, highlight a Wurlitzer [*electric piano*] or something else instead, and replay the song from that angle. And that created a sonic space that allowed the lyrics to breathe differently.

You used a drum machine and percussion instruments, and throughout the album one can hear these little rhythmic accents popping up in the songs. It seems like they're a central part of the arrangements because they sound like hooks, but in an understated way.
Yeah, I wanted that to be a feature. It created a meditative, repetitive feel that would build over the course of the songs. A big part of this album is the percussion, and a lot of the rhythms are the equivalent of a riff or a refrain. I thought it'd be so cool to find a different approach instead of using a melodic guitar riff or piano line. Stella is an amazing drummer and percussionist. The rhythms might sound simple at first, until you tune into all the little things happening and realize how complicated it is, without being over the top.

You once said in an interview that you look for left-field sounds to make things interesting in headphones. Did that apply to this album as well?
I mean, always. That's the fun part of recording. Doing the weird things, like banging a case against the floor and affecting sounds in ways that we aren't used to hearing. On my last album, I recorded the sound of my kettle boiling [*on "Hopefullessness," which also features a great feedback-driven solo*]. It comes in halfway through the song and slowly creeps up and up like a weird, anxiety-inducing, drone sound. On this album, we did a lot of field recordings. I'm not sure they made it onto the album, but they were inspiring to capture and hear. On one part of a song, I played my guitar with a cello bow to create a droning, synthy string sound.

Parts of your album are about healing after a breakup, and one of the songs, "Here's the Thing," has an instrumental passage that feels very cinematic and blue. It has lush rhythm guitars and these otherworldly-sounding notes that are floating above the chords. Is that a vocal or a guitar?
That's actually the song with the cello bow. There are strings underneath it, and sometimes they sound like trumpets. It was just a weird frequency. But that main melodic door-bell type of sound that you're referring to is an Omnichord [*an electronic autoharp-synthesizer*] that we had in the studio. We messed around for quite a while, trying to find the right sound and the right idea, and then we probably put it through some effects as well just to make it more wobbly, like it was underwater.

"EVERY TIME I TRY TO OVERDUB A BETTER GUITAR PART OR SOLO, IT NEVER HAS THAT SAME ENERGY"

What amps and effects did you use on the album?
I didn't take any gear with me besides my electric guitar. I know I used the studio's Mesa/Boogie and Roland Jazz Chorus [*JC-120*] amps. I also didn't have my usual pedals, which forced me out of my comfort zone. I used their [*Death by Audio*] Reverberation pedal a lot, and the [*Electro-Harmonix*] POG for the chorusy, wavy and wobbly sounds. The studio also had a vintage vibrato pedal and some overdrives that I used.

Onstage at Coachella, April 16, 2016

Onstage at Bonnaroo Arts and Music Festival, Manchester, Tennessee, June 11, 2015

Are all your songs and solos created through inspiration by just staying open to whatever comes, or do you ever set up any sort of framework?
No, it's normally pretty feel-based. I try to just trust that instinct and feeling.

You're known for your lyrics, which tend to be conversational, often with a dry or wry sense of humor, and full of great observations about people and mundane things. Do lyrics inform your guitar playing in any way?
It happens sometimes. It's fun to find the emotional match. In "Take It Day by Day," which is a bass-driven song, the lyrics are slightly playful and cheeky, and the guitar kind of matches that. The bass is a little bit overdriven and bratty. When the guitars and the synths do the riff [*sings a staccato melody*], it also has a bratty quality to it.

You also went to a visual arts school when you were 18 to 20 years old, and you're often involved in the making of your music videos and album cover art. How does art influence your music?
The visual stuff and music inspire each other. Just like the power of silence in music, there's the power of negative space in visual art. It all overlaps, and there's no formula. It all depends on the song and the moment.

And when one creative avenue dries up, it's good to explore another one until the ground gets more fertile again.
Exactly.

Danny Cohen has made a documentary about you called *Anonymous Club*, where he followed you on the road for a couple of years. How did you connect?
Danny is a really good friend of mine, and he's made a couple of my video clips. He came on tour with me pretty much from the album cycle for *Tell Me How You Really Feel*. He was on and off tours around the world, and made this really beautiful and pretty simple film.

What did you talk about, and what was the filming experience like for you?
We talked a lot about the art-making process and the fears behind being an artist. There was so much deep and personal stuff. So even if there was some confronting, for the most part it was an interesting process.

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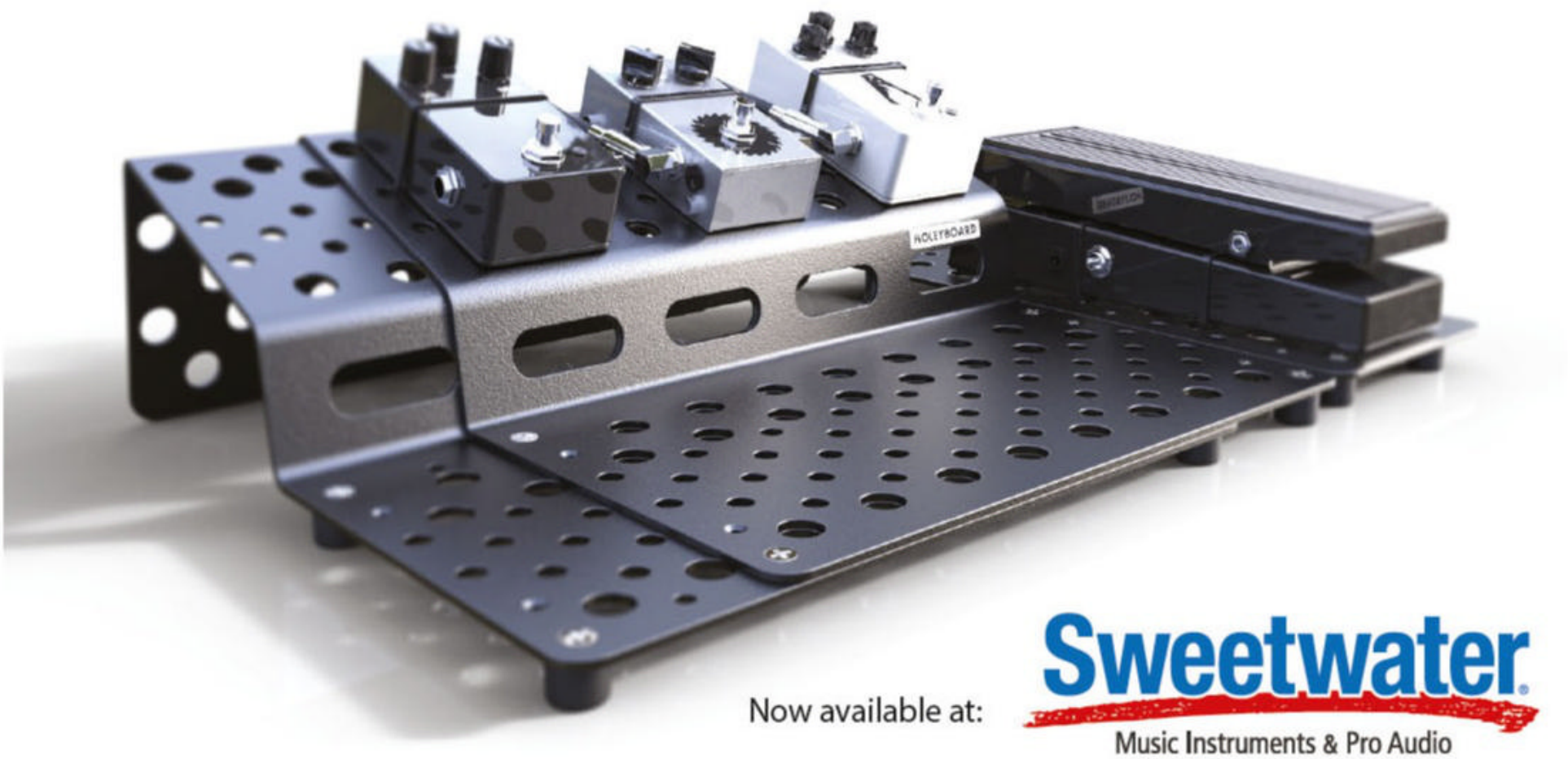

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LEO *RISING*

After 50 years, **Leo Nocentelli's** long-lost solo debut reveals a softer side to the hard-nosed electric funk legend.

BY JIMMY LESLIE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY AB SYKES PHOTOGRAPHY

LEO NOCENTELLI WAS once a sensitive '70s singer-songwriter? Well, who knew?

What everyone should know is that Nocentelli was counted as one of *Guitar Player*'s 50 Greatest Rhythm Guitarists of All Time, is a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award recipient and one of the most sampled guitar players in recorded history. As a founding member of the Meters, he helped lay the blueprint for modern New Orleans funk in the '60s and '70s, and he's carried the torch proudly into the present. Nocentelli is the maestro responsible for the stank-nasty syncopated riffs anchoring classics including "Cissy Strut," "Fire on the Bayou" and "Just Kissed My Baby." His extensive sideman credits include supporting an array of artists, from Patti LaBelle to Dr. John, Robert Palmer and Lee Dorsey, so one would figure the world has a pretty complete picture of the player's stylistic range. That's what makes *Another Side* such a shock.

Die-hard fans that have followed the man for decades have never even seen him with an acoustic guitar, so to have *Another Side* drop like mana from a time machine, showcasing not only Nocentelli's unplugged chops but also his fine handle on the narrative lyrical style and melodic vocal delivery of a golden-era singer-songwriter, is nothing short of a revelation. The album's folk-funk sound brings to mind Bill Withers, Paul Pena or perhaps a groovier Jim Croce or James Taylor. But none of those players have anything close to Nocentelli's musical flair.

Put on "Riverfront" and notice how the riff melds bass and treble ideas within a call-and-response motif, kind of like Nocentelli's signature licks on "Cissy Strut." Now consider that he's working a gut-string acoustic with a classically inspired fingerstyle technique, which is best exemplified at the very outset of the album on the introduction to "Thinking of the Day." It's wild to consider such a fingerstyle etude coming from a player known for his laser-focused pick attack on an electric axe.

"I BOUGHT A GUT-STRING GOYA AND STARTED PLAYING CLASSICAL GUITAR. THAT STARTED ME ON THE ACOUSTIC WAY OF THINKING"

The backstory of how *Another Side* was cut and finally came to light is even more far fetched. After the Meters' original label, Josie, went belly up, Nocentelli went into Cosimo Matassa's Jazz City Studio with fellow Meters George Porter Jr. and Joseph "Zigaboo" Modeliste — bass and drums, respectively — as well as drummer James Black, plus national treasure Allen Toussaint of "Southern Nights" fame on piano. They worked on Nocentelli's folky acoustic songs occasionally over a couple of months before he got back to his usual funky business when the Meters signed with Warner Brothers and blew up on both sides of the Atlantic as the opener on the Rolling Stones' 1975–'76 tour. Everyone, including Leo himself, forgot about Nocentelli's acoustic fling.

When Hurricane Katrina leveled New Orleans in 2005, it was assumed that all of the archives stored in Toussaint's Sea-Saint Studios, including Nocentelli's album, were lost in the flood. Fast-forward to 2019, when *The Los Angeles Times* broke the news that oodles of tapes from Jazz City and Sea-Saint had been

saved and stored in the City of Angels, and that boxes full had surfaced at a swap meet in Torrance, California. Record collector Mike Nishita made the lucky discovery, and he brought it to the attention of Matt Sullivan, whose Light in the Attic label specializes in releasing such rare finds. It's worth clarifying that this is not a reissue — it's the first-ever release of a long-lost gem. *Another Side* dropped on November 19, and Nocentelli's phone has been ringing off the hook with calls from *The New York Times*, *Washington Post* and, of course, *GP*.

Can you set the stage concerning the time frame for *Another Side*?
The Meters did three instrumental albums for Josie, and then during the downtime after *Struttin'* and before the first Warner Brothers album, *Cabbage Alley*, I bought a couple of James Taylor albums: *Mudslide Slim* and *Sweet Baby James*. I was enthused about the chord progressions from a musical standpoint, and the profound stories from a lyrical

"IT'S AN OXYMORON. A BRAND-NEW HIT ALBUM RECORDED 50 YEARS AGO"

standpoint. You can hear his influence on some of the guitar parts, especially on songs in the key of D, like "I Want to Cry," where I cop of bit of that "Country Road" kind of stuff. I tried to incorporate storytelling on songs like "You've Become a Habit," which is about a man falling in love with a lady of the night named Fancy, and on "Riverfront," which is a workingman song. I wrote it about Aaron Neville, who had a job toting bananas before he became successful. I used to see him walking home on Valence Street and wonder what it was like working on the riverfront.

Your acoustic playing sounds pretty accomplished right off the bat, with the introduction to "Thinking of the Day," which is like a classical etude. Was it just the JT albums that got you going, or is there more to the story?
Well, I had played some acoustic along with my daddy when I was coming up, but that's not what's really important here. During the downtime period, a friend of mine named Charles "Louie" Moore, who is the brother of Deacon John Moore, showed me how to play a Bach concerto on his classical, gut-string guitar. I was so intrigued that I went out and bought a gut-string Goya and started playing classical guitar. That started me on the acoustic way of thinking, and I used that guitar to record *Another Side*.

What was your plucking approach?
I was studying classical guitar at the time and adopted a fingerstyle approach. I didn't use a pick on the entire album. It's a different mindset and a different approach from the funky electric pick playing I was doing with the Meters. I did track one electric guitar solo for *Another Side*, on "Till I Get There."

"Riverfront" sounds closest to the funky stuff you were doing with the Meters. How did you arrive at that feel, and what's going on inside your guitar part?
It has that feel because I found the groove in E, and I'm bouncing back and forth between working the lower strings and the upper strings for the two different movements in the riff. The lower riff incorporates the low E every other time, like a big bass note dropping.

Nocentelli holds a vinyl pressing of *Another Side*.

I found it challenging when I was writing the song, and I nearly threw it in the trash, but it sounded so good that I had to keep on doing it. It's still a challenge, but it is a bit easier to play on a gut-string acoustic, because the string spacing is a bit wider and there's a smidgen more room to work a riff like that. You don't have to squeeze your fingers in as much.

It's interesting that you cover Elton John's "Your Song" for the album closer in the same key as the original. To meet the challenge of playing in E♭, did you perhaps play out of a D chord formation using a capo at the first fret?
I caught on to that song right when it came out, because there was something about the phrasing of the vocal melody and the movement of all those chords underneath it. I didn't use a capo; I just used my ear to figure out a way to interpret the chords and transfer them from piano to guitar. Listening to it now, I don't see how I could have done that. I guess I had more time and more patience back then than I do now.

Your young voice sounds lovely singing in a melodic style, and one would imagine that it would be a challenge to recreate all the intricate fingerstyle acoustic and intimate vocals on a live stage. Got any touring plans?
Yes, I'm getting lots of calls to play

Nocentelli poses in the 1970s with his Fender Starcaster

including some European dates. Quint Davis from the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival requested that I play my hard stuff one day on the Acura Stage and then do *Another Side* on another stage for the folk and country crowd. I think George Strait is going to be the headliner. So for one gig I'll have on my rock and roll tennis shoes, and for the other I'll have to put on my shit kickers. At a regular gig we'll intermingle some of the songs from the new album. It's going to be a three-guitar band, as I'm planning to have a couple of other players flesh out the music while I'm focused on singing. One will cover the 12-string parts that I originally overdubbed on the album, and the other will be tasked with doing the intricate fingerpicking. It's not that I can't, but it is very difficult to do that while singing those parts that I recorded back when I was 24 or 25 years old. I'm basically going to strum a little on a steel-string.

What guitars will you bring?
I always have my signature Gibson ES-335, the Mardi Gras–colored Bourbon Street. Dunlop just finished making a new signature wah-wah pedal called the Mardi Gras that's colored purple, gold and green as well. And when the acoustic album came up, Peter Leinheiser at Gibson was gracious enough to let me pick out a brand -new steel-string acoustic-electric with a cutaway. It's a Gibson Songwriter Standard EC Rosewood, and I picked it because it was so beautiful. Steve Klein was kind enough to send me an unbelievable and very unique guitar that's shaped like medieval hatchet. I love the way it looks, and it sounds like a Telecaster, which is one of the guitars I played for years back in the early days. The Fender Starcaster that I played a lot in the Meters was a completely different animal, semihollow with humbucking pickups, like the 335. Gibson doesn't make Tele- or Strat-style guitars, so even though I endorse Gibson, they're cool with having me get those sounds from these other custom builds. For a more Strat-like sound, Delaney is building me a guitar with a semihollow body and Strat-style pickups. I think it's going to be called the Leo Frankenstein.

The Mardi Gras is Dunlop's new Leo Nocentelli signature Cry Baby wah pedal.

PHOTOGRAPH © RICK OLIVIER–WWW.RICKOLIVIER.COM (NOCENTELLI)

It sounds like there are lots of exciting things happening on the heels of the "new" album.
It's such an oxymoron — a brand-new hit album that was recorded 50 years ago. It simply fell by the wayside when I was devoting all my time to making Meters records for Warner Brothers. I kind of lost interest and forgot about it. The rest is history. And the music is some crazy shit, man, because it's like the opposite of me. The response is unbelievable. I'm glad I was able to do something that the people love. And I'm going to keep on doing it. I feel like now is the time to reap some of the benefits out of what I've done in my career.

EMBRACING AN ANOMALY

How to make the unique relationship between the G and B strings work for you.

BY CHRIS BUONO

BACK IN 1996, while perusing an issue of *Guitar for the Practicing Musician* magazine, I stumbled upon a lesson called the "The Warp Refraction Principle" by columnist Jon Finn. An esteemed player, author and Berklee College of Music professor, Finn is obviously a fellow avid sci-fi fan and knew how to draw me in with that title. In that gem of a lesson, Jon explained that the guitar fretboard is divided into two separate and similarly ordered universes. The line between them is drawn by a lone interval within the five pairs of adjacent strings produced by standard tuning: (low to high) E, A, D, G, B, E. In examining each adjacent-string pair, you'll observe that all but one are a perfect 4th, or two and one half steps, apart — E - A, A - D, D - G and B - E — leaving a single major 3rd interval, equal to two whole steps, between the G and B strings. Though seemingly inconsequential, this half-step and one-fret difference creates a fair amount of fretboard chaos, especially for those who thrive in the otherwise symmetrical regions. Playing the same perfect 4th interval, for example, C to F, across all five adjacent-string pairs (**Ex. 1**) reveals the issue at hand. The dyad played on the G and B strings requires the higher note to be played one fret higher to compensate for the smaller interval between these two strings.

Fig. 1 shows another way to look at this conundrum, by visually examining the distance between adjacent strings. Notice how the red diagonal line from the open B string to the B note on the G string's 4th fret spans one less fret than the other diagonal lines? Whichever way it reveals itself to you, the fact remains that the G - B string pair creates the vexing neck vision schism that Finn donned the Warp Refraction Threshold, or WRT, for short. Keeping with his space-fantasy imagery, it's akin to a guitar neck wormhole that creates the optical illusion that fingerings are offset by one fret. Jon goes on to paint this more as a mirage and suggests, by organizing the neck into a vision that emphasizes string sets that employ perfect 4ths, that the offset is moot. While the result of Professor Finn's approach is brilliant, game changing and a must-study, there's a whole heap of musical and guitar-playing potential nested in the WRT. To that end, I'm going to show you how to embrace the major 3rd anomaly so that it can help you conjure new chordal and single-note ideas.

Let's start by unpacking the positive effects that WRT can have on your neck

ADAM GASSON

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vision through chords. I often use chords to visualize and navigate the neck, as well as coordinate and maintain scale fingering systems [*Check out Chris's Parallel Pentatonic Modal Vision lesson in the June 2019 issue of* GP]. In doing so, I'm constantly moving chords around, and, as a result, often come up against sets of identical chords that call for different fingerings as part of their relocation. The need for the adjustments and what they ultimately are rests on where the G and B strings appear in the chords.

To begin to see how this plays out, let's look at **Figs. 2–4**. Here you'll find three root-position B♭ triads (B♭, D, F), starting on the 3-2-1 string set (Fig. 2), that progress diagonally to the lower sets 4-3-2 and 5-4-3, as illustrated in Figures

THOUGH SEEMINGLY INCONSEQUENTIAL, THIS HALF-STEP AND ONE-FRET DIFFERENCE CREATES A FAIR AMOUNT OF FRETBOARD CHAOS, ESPECIALLY FOR THOSE WHO THRIVE IN THE SYMMETRICAL REGIONS

3 and 4, respectively. While these fretboard shapes retain the same pitch, their fingerings vary each time as a result of WRT.

You can do this with any chord by following a three-step process. First, shift a chord down vertically to a lower adjacent-string set. Next, with the same fingering, move your fret hand horizontally five frets up the neck, or a perfect 4th. Finally, when it arrives at the new location, the note that lands on the G string goes down a half step. If you're switching chords to higher string sets, then, conversely, whatever note lands on the B string moves up a half step.

At this point, everyone's inner Arnold Horshack is on the verge of throwing an overextended hand in the air while

Ex. 1

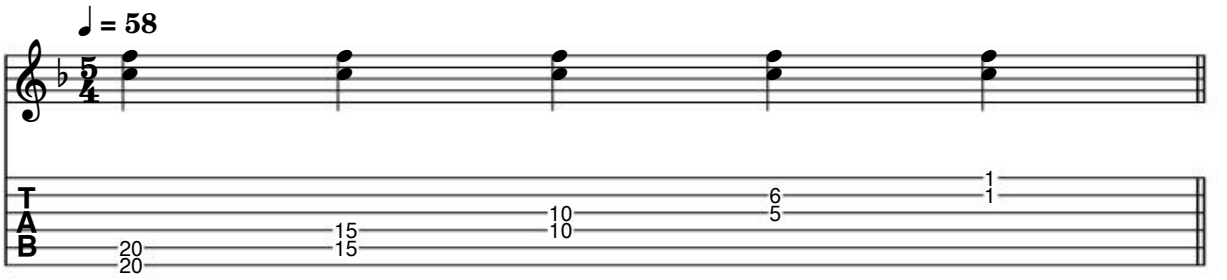


Fig. 1

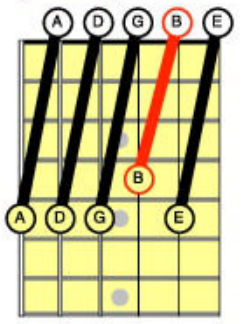


Fig. 2

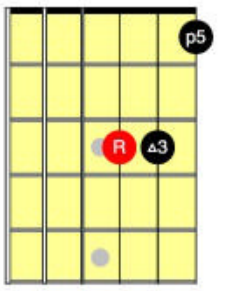


Fig. 3

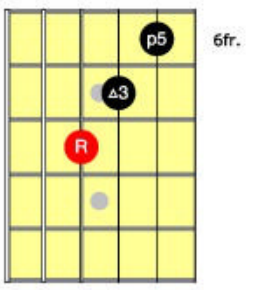
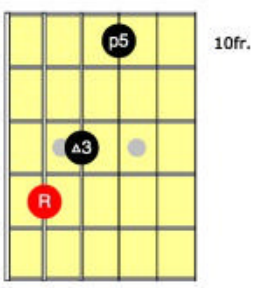
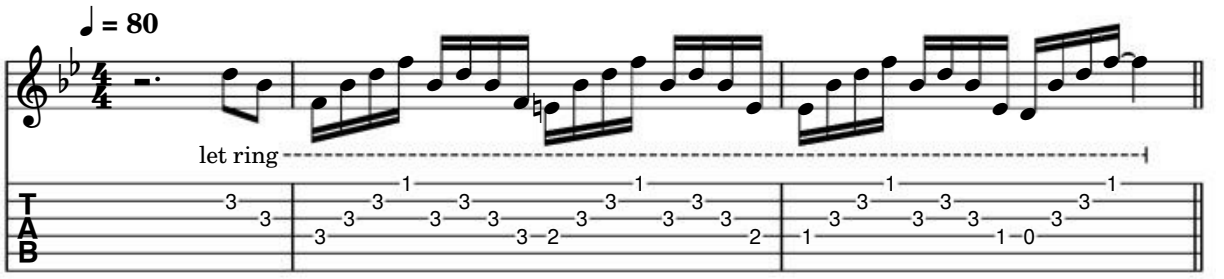


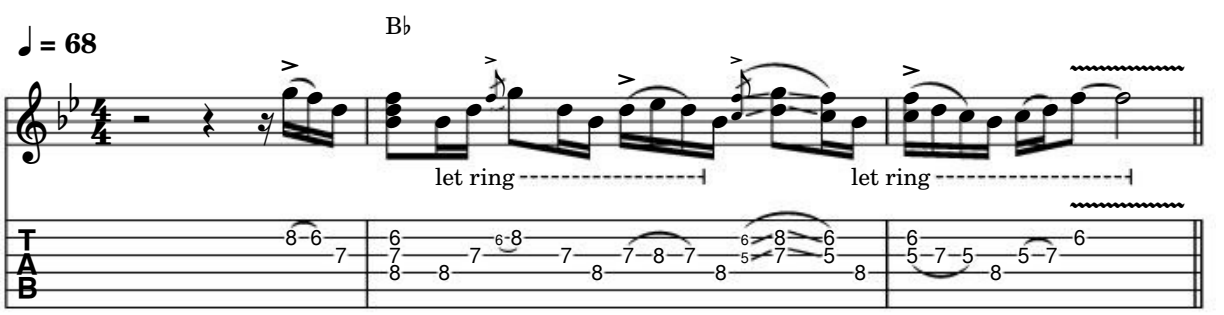
Fig. 4



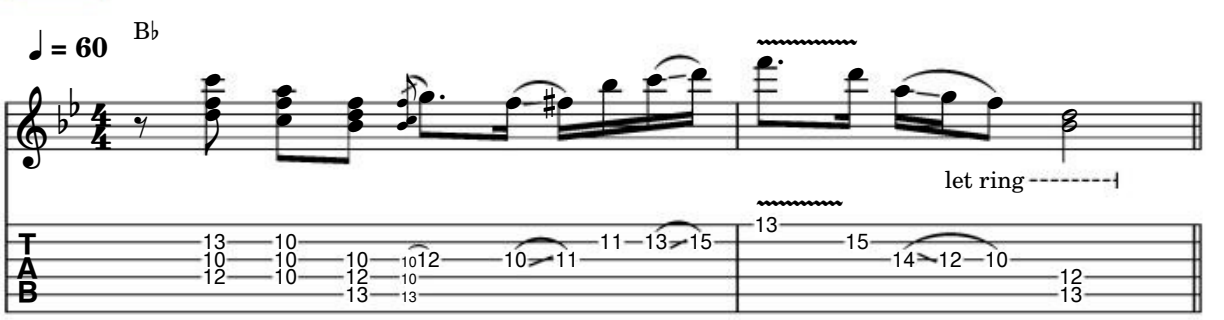
Ex. 2



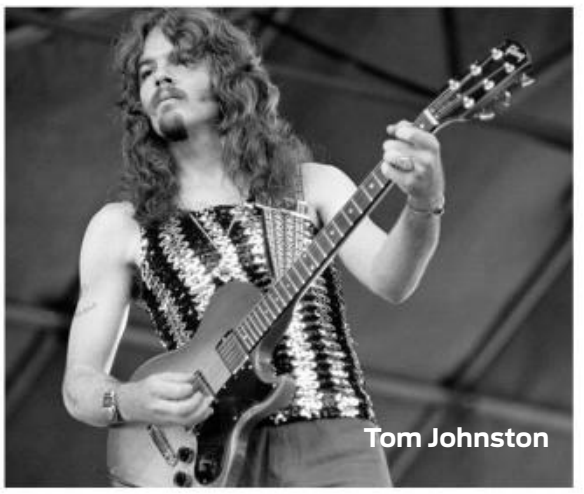
Ex. 3



Ex. 4



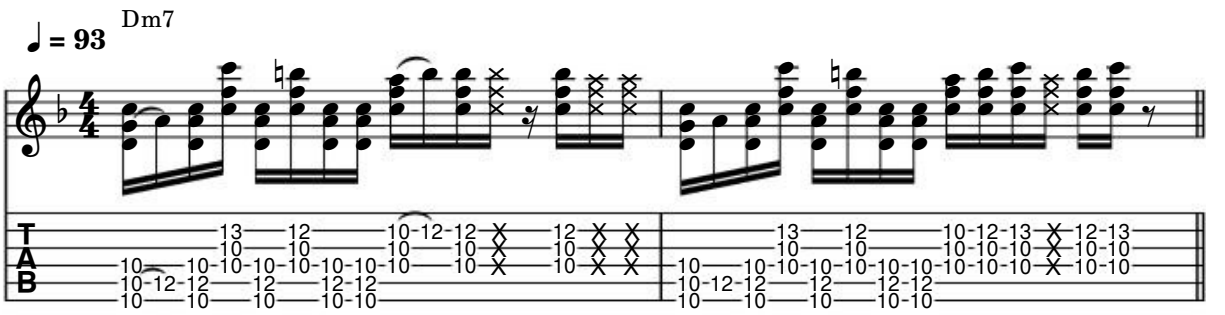
feverishly asking about the need to know the same chord in more than one place on the neck. The answer is simple: Control of creative freedom. **Examples 2–4** highlight some of what the B♭ triads seen in Figures 2–4 can do in their respective areas of the fretboard. While the chords are the focus, it's what's at your disposal in those positions that can give those passages their individual character. While the notes in Examples 2-4 could be played in other positions, they would not only succumb to fingering issues that make them needlessly more difficult to play, they


Tom Johnston

would also sound different, due to the variation in string gauge and neck position, both of which affect a note's timbre on this instrument. These positional hallmarks will serve as an important factor in your decision-making process when composing, comping and improvising. At the center of it all is WRT because, without it, aside from open-string possibilities, there would be no fingering differences, and it is those differences that serve as your canvas. The moral of the story is this: A deeper vision of the neck founded on an informed approach to controlling the WRT affords you a more colorful sonic palette to work with.

A good neck vision rests not only on how well you can navigate WRT but also on how well you can manipulate it to your artistic advantage. Take **Examples 5** and **6**, where I make use of a Dm7 chord, first in 10th position (Ex. 5) and then in 5th position (Ex. 6). The almost identical passages are separated by two elements. In addition to timbre, which is always a variable, there's a single nested hammer-on that kicks off Ex. 5, compared to the two instances in Ex. 6, thanks to the added hammer-on between the major 2nd (E) and minor 3rd (F) on the B string. The option to have this kind of oblique motion within a barre chord voicing — toggling between a chord's minor 3rd and its 2nd (the sus2) or its major 3rd to its 4th (the sus4), using hammer-ons or pull-offs — can be used to add melodic interest to a chord-based riff. Well-known examples of this factor abound, as it has served as the sulfur behind many celebrated guitar riffs. For instance, a similar sus2-to-minor-3rd application can be heard in Tom Johnston's strumming on the Doobie Brothers' "Long Train Running," whereas notable major 3rd-to-sus4

Ex. 5



Ex. 6

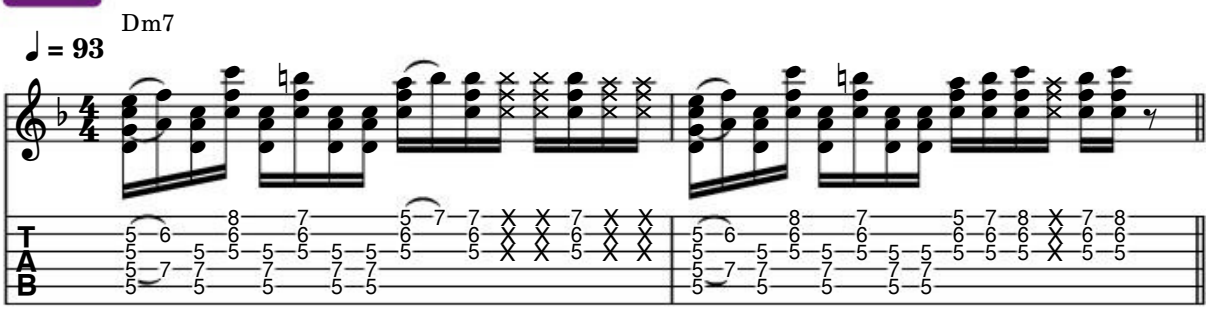


Fig. 5

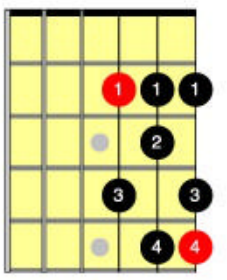


Fig. 6

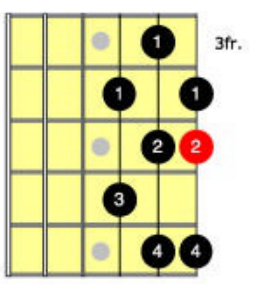


Fig. 7

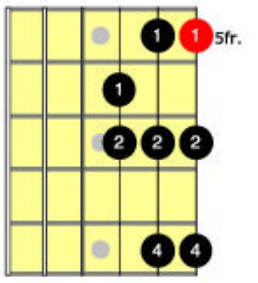


Fig. 8

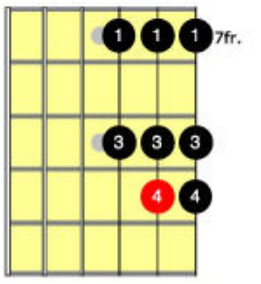


Fig. 9

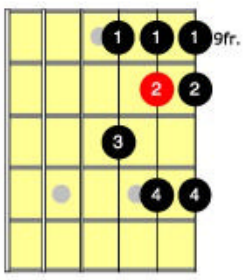


Fig. 10

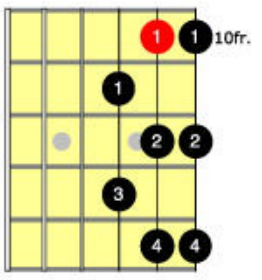
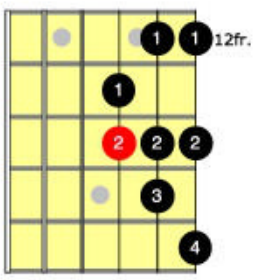


Fig. 11



IAN DICKSON/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

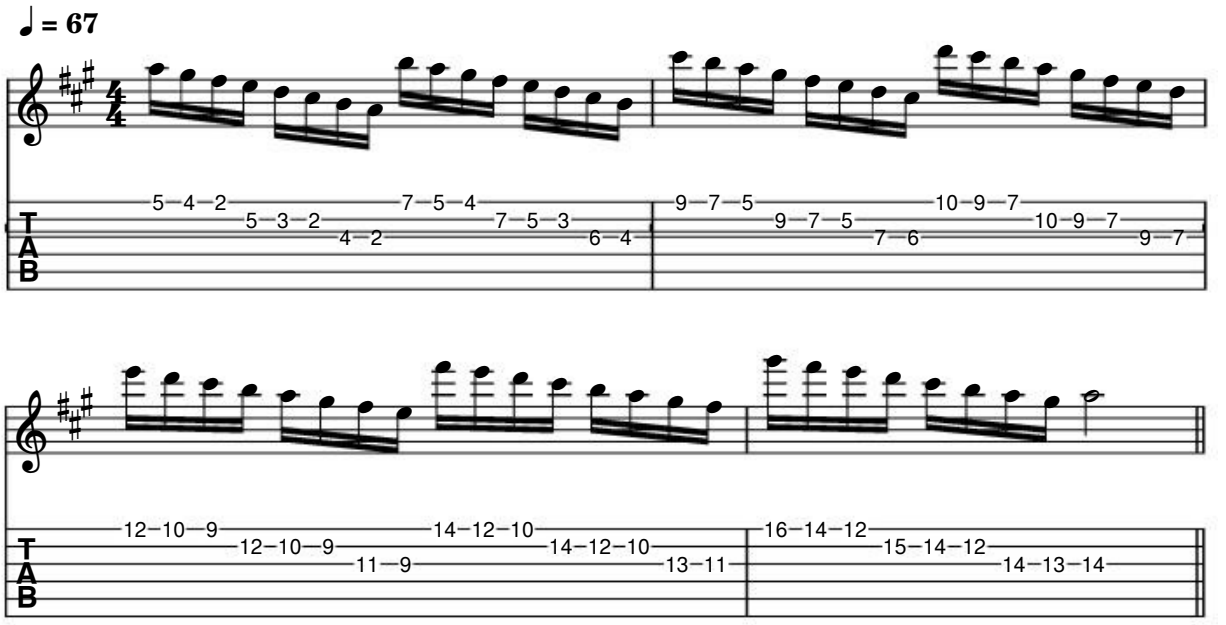
flavorings are heard in Van Halen's "Running with the Devil" and "Start Me Up" by the Rolling Stones, to name but a few. Once again, the existence of this option is due to WRT.

Shifting gears into single-note territory, WRT can inspire a whole new way to work with scale systems on multiple fronts. Let's look at some approaches created on a framework that I call "one-octave cells." Focusing on the top three strings, I condense scales into similarly mapped-out eight-note sequences, with two notes played on the G string and three notes played on the B and high E, as illustrated with the A major scale (A, B, C♯, D, E, F♯, G♯) in **Figures 5–11**. (The A root note is highlighted in red, and the numbers within the circles indicate fret-hand fingerings.) Notice that each shape is bookended by the same fingers — 1 and 4 — with the added bonus that the lowest note is fretted by the index finger, whereupon you'll feel the most balance. These inviting fingerings and their attributes only exist within WRT, which is a good thing, since much of the action concerning melodies, licks and solos happens on the G, B and high E strings.

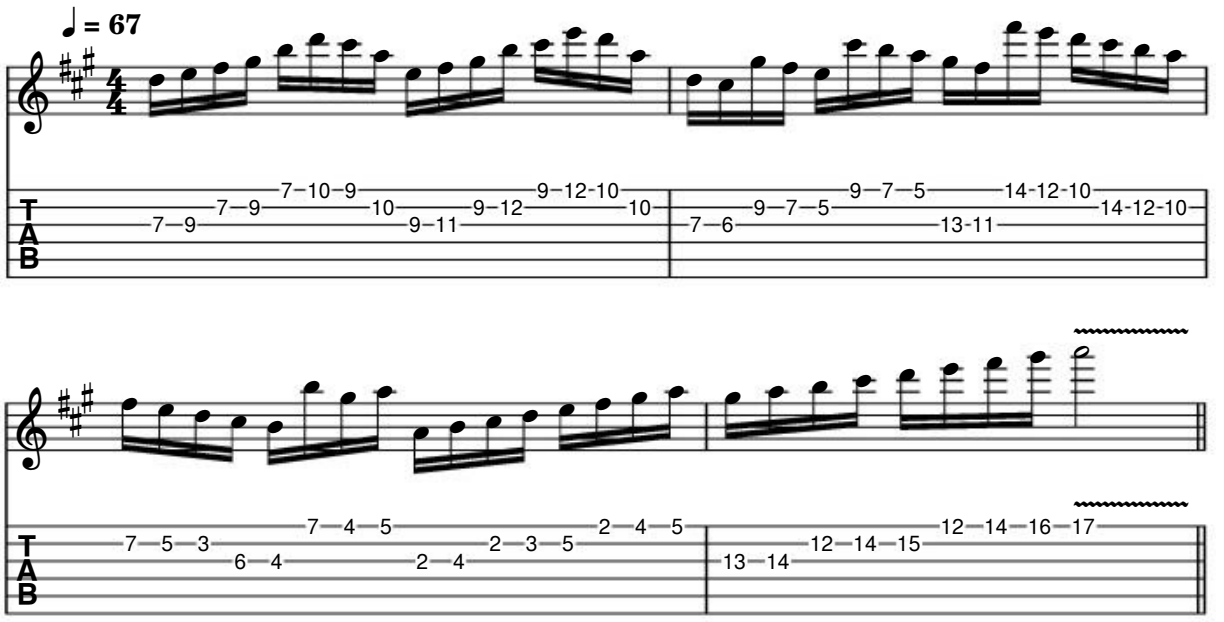
A GOOD NECK VISION RESTS NOT ONLY ON HOW WELL YOU CAN NAVIGATE WRT BUT ALSO ON HOW WELL YOU CAN MANIPULATE IT TO YOUR ARTISTIC ADVANTAGE

Playing through these seven positions of the A major scale will highlight the compactness of the major 3rd interval between the G and B strings while you hone and bolster not only your neck vision but also your chops and ear training. **Ex. 7** starts it off with a horizontal ascent up the fretboard, made up of a sequence of descending runs within each successive fingering pattern and position that resolves to the root of

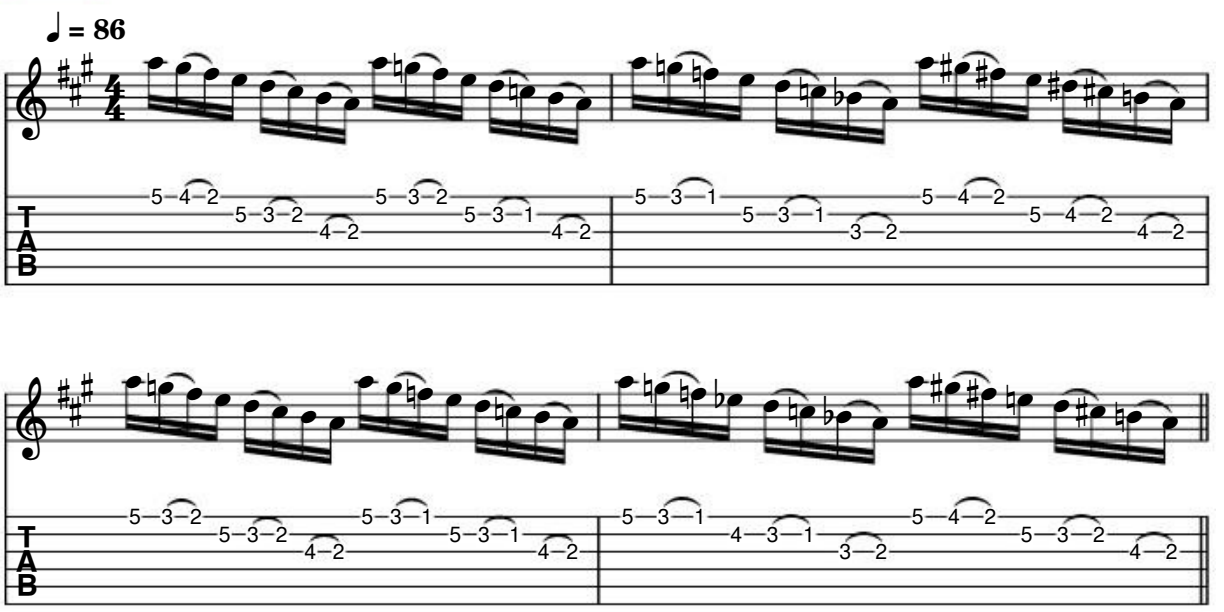
Ex. 7



Ex. 8



Ex. 9



each of the A major scale's seven relative modes — A Ionian, B Dorian, C♯ Phrygian, D Lydian, E Mixolydian, F♯ Aeolian and G♯ Locrian. **Ex. 8** adds directional changes and melodic skips, and ricochets the note sequencing within each given pattern and position.

Speaking more to ear training and adding a legato element, **Ex. 9** stations the fingerings in one vertical position — 2nd position — so that what was formerly seven iterations of the A major scale is now a sample pack of the seven mode formulas, all transposed to a parallel A tonal center. And so we now have A Ionian followed by A Dorian, A Phrygian, A Lydian, etc.

With the relationship between the WRT and one-octave cells laid out, we can dig deeper. First, we're going to shift the modal root orientation of our seven A major scale fingering patterns and

Keith Richards

positions to B Dorian (B, C♯, D, E, F♯, G♯, A), as illustrated in **Figures 12–18**, with the B root note now highlighted in red in each pattern. At the same time, we're changing the notes-per-string architecture of each fingering pattern from "2-3-3" to "3-2-3," with three notes now played on the G string, two on the B string and three on the high E. You notice, however, that in some of these shapes, namely those shown in Figures 14, 15 and 18, I've added an extra, third note on the B string, which duplicates and repeats the highest note played on the G string. These alternative fingering options are made possible by WRT and will be duly exploited.

Take note: Reassigning a root note is only the first step in morphing a set of

Fig. 12

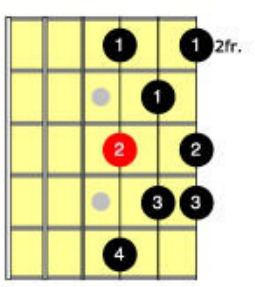


Fig. 13

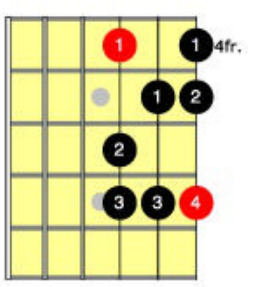


Fig. 14

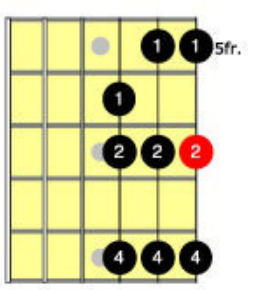


Fig. 15

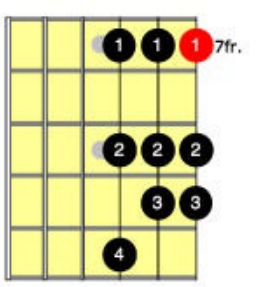


Fig. 16

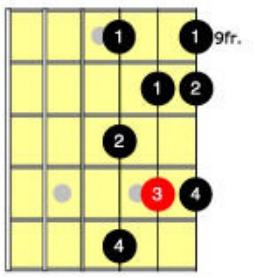


Fig. 17

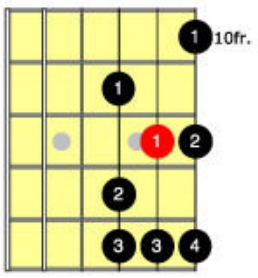
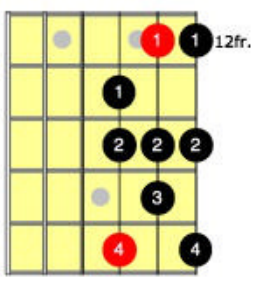
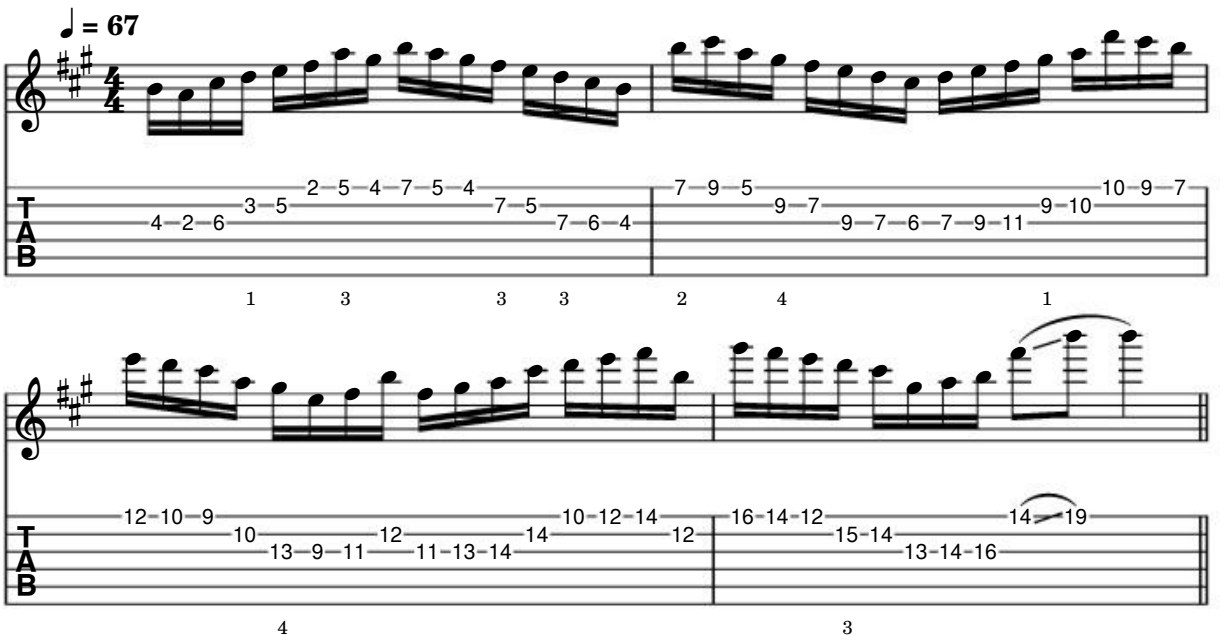


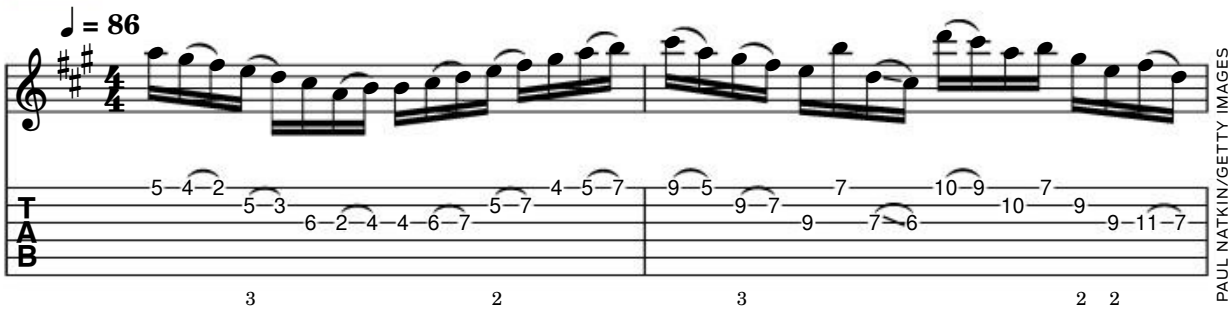
Fig. 18



Ex. 10



Ex. 11



PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES

fingerings into a new modal color. To help establish a connection, check out **Examples 10** and **11**, where we have a pair of ping-ponging runs that work their way up the neck through our three-string B Dorian patterns, melodically emphasizing our new B root note along the way while acclimating you to the potential of the "hot-rodded" fingering approach, with certain shapes offering the previously illustrated duplicate/alternate fingerings for the same note on the G and B strings.

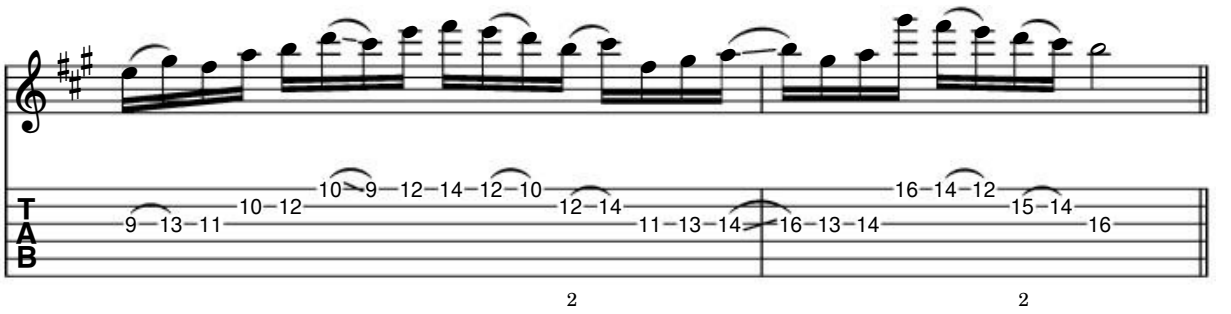
When you're ready, dial in your preferred OD tone and dig into these final four licks. **Ex. 12** wastes no time making use of the new architecture seen in Fig. 12, stringing together groups of 32nd notes and 16th note triplets with strategically placed pull-offs.

Ex. 13 takes the Fig. 15 shape for a ride, demonstrating the two placement and fingering options available for the F♯ note — at the 11th fret on the G string or on the B string's 7th fret.

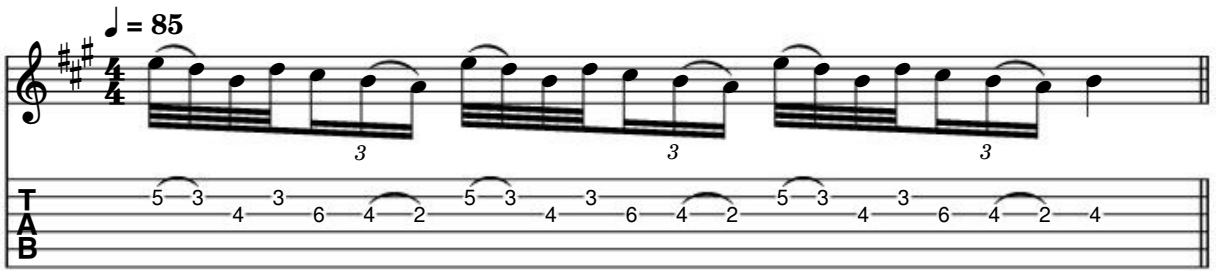
Maintaining a focus on this "clone tone" element, while also offering more involved phrasing options with an alternate picking/legato stew, **Ex. 14** overlaps the shapes from Figures 17 and 18 and has us bouncing between the clone tone B notes within the first two beats before seeking out a descending Bm arpeggio that leads to a climatic whole-step bend from A to B on the high E string's 17th fret.

Ex. 15 leaves you with a scorching lick played in the shape from Fig. 13. This phrase is packed with multiple legato articulations, a quintuplet phrase (in beat 2), a smattering of rhythmic spice and, going from beat 3 to beat 4, a "clone-tone slide" before finally resolving to our B Dorian root note on the high E string's 7th fret.

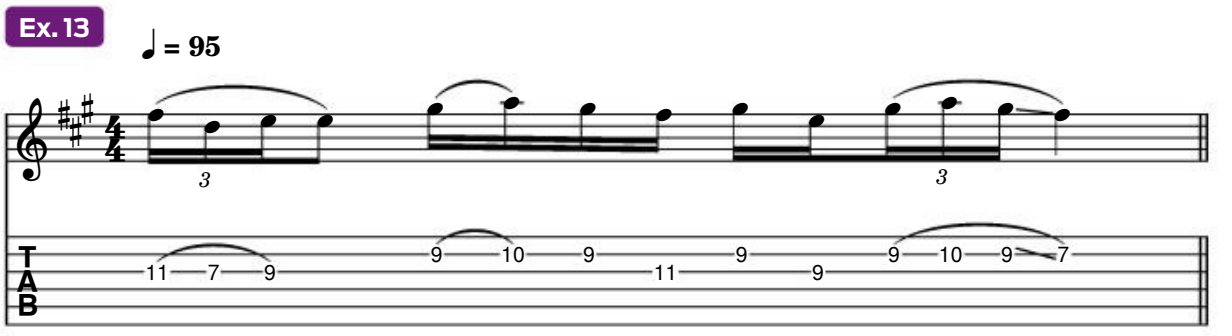
For me, Jon Finn's Warp Refraction Threshold paved a whole new way to view and consider chords and scales, as well as melodic phrasing. I hope my deep dive into the major 3rd anomaly between the G and B strings in this lesson serves as a catalyst for your own fretboard and musical explorations, in the same way that Jon's article did for me!



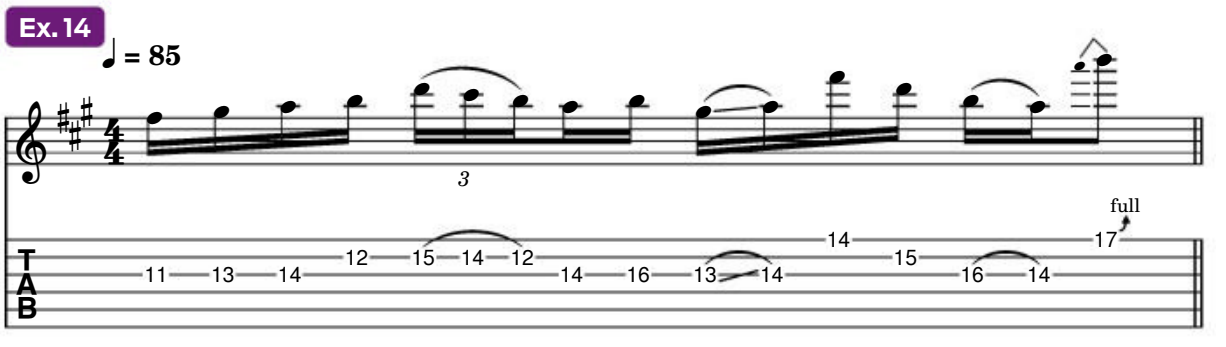
Ex. 12



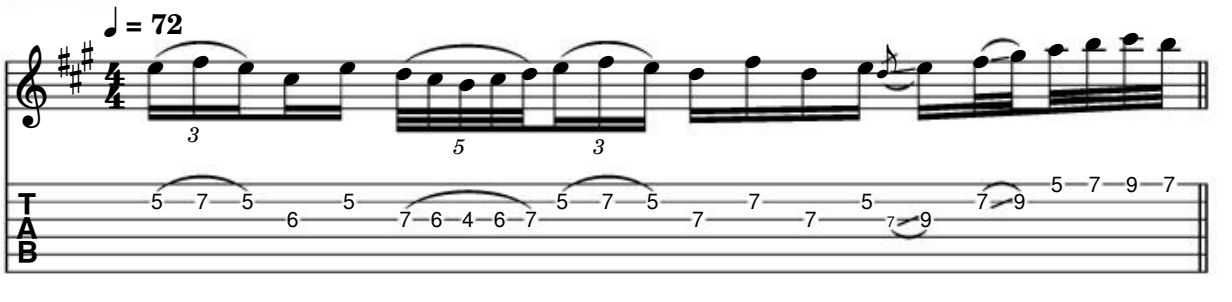
Ex. 13



Ex. 14



Ex. 15



Acoustic Blues Musings, Pt. 5

Slide material matters with Sonny Landreth, Leo Kottke and Roy Rogers.

BY JIMMY LESLIE

Leo Kottke using a glass slide in 1970

IN OUR CLOSING installment of Acoustic Blues Musings, we'll delve into how the tools of the trade inform three legendary slide stylists. Roy Rogers explains why his robust string and slinky glass choices are perfect for his strain of Delta blues. Impeccable electric slide whiz Sonny Landreth details his M.O. when switching to an acoustic. Finally, the incomparable Leo Kottke tells how his technical and tonal preferences led to his hallmark slide sound.

ROGERS ON STRINGING UP STRONG

In Roy Rogers' July 2018 Frets feature, he advised starting with thick strings: "A player should use heavier strings for playing slide because heavier strings deliver stronger tone, and tone is king. On my Martin 0-16NY, I use D'Addario's Silk and Steel set, except that I substitute heavier strings — a .013 and a .016 — for the first and second strings. I use a medium set of bronze strings on my 12-string Dobro, and I use heavy strings — .016 to .056 — on my National."

"WHAT SLIDE YOU CHOOSE IS REALLY ABOUT COMFORT," ROGERS SAYS. "TRY A FEW, AND THEN DECIDE"

SLIDE MATERIAL MATTERS

It generally follows that a heavy slide would best handle heavy strings, but that all depends on your style, according to Rogers. "What slide you choose is really about comfort," he says. "Try a few, and then decide. Metal slides have more tonal bite. When I first started playing slide after seeing Muddy Waters perform, I used a short metal one like him. Now I prefer a shorter glass slide — a Dunlop 212 — because a lighter slide works well for the fast, horn-like riffs I often play, and a larger slide would be more cumbersome."

SONNY SAYS

When electric ace Sonny Landreth showed his acoustic side playing resonators on *Recorded Live in Lafayette*, the glass master made the opposite switch, as he explained in the October 2017 Frets feature.

"I used a metal slide that I hacked off from a motorcycle handlebar when I was a teenager. It's longer and weighs more than glass, so I was able to get a bigger, smoother sound and wider vibrato. It helps me produce more energy and punch playing live. That's one of the adjustments I've been making because I have such a light touch on the electric. The metal bar aids me in the challenge of approaching the acoustic, especially on the top strings. Even more to the point is trying to incorporate my fingernails to get more plucking power, rather than the flesh of my fingertips."

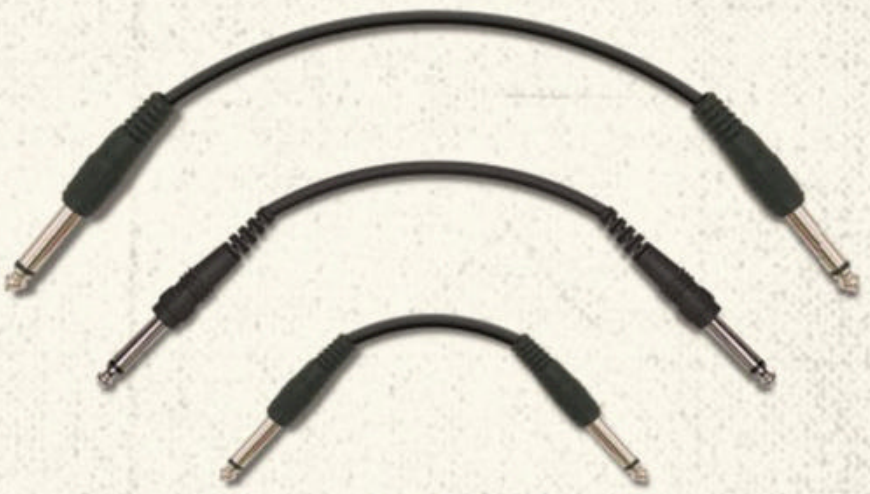
LEARN FROM LEO

A big bronze bugger like the original Leo Kottke Acousta-Glide signature slide is excellent for achieving a robust acoustic tone that's a bit mellower than steel, although such a beast can be a bit unwieldy, requiring broader strokes. That slows your vibrato roll, which sounds more sophisticated than a quick quiver. Once you get a feel for it, a big brass slide can help hold down a full barre across all the strings. Kottke explains, "I don't spend much time staying on one side of the neck or the other. I needed a slide that would allow me to do that without fuzzing out or lisping or, you know, all of that shit that can happen."

SLIDE ON

In this five-part column, we've covered everything from choosing gear to unlocking open tunings on seminal songs, as well as hip tricks and pro tips. Hopefully you've found inspiration to delve into the swampy waters of authentic acoustic blues. Its rich heritage is now at your fingertips. An ocean of historic blues videos that were nearly impossible to track down in the not so distant past are now easy to find and fun to explore endlessly on YouTube. Enjoy mastering the vernacular and good luck amalgamating your unique mojo fingerprint.

GAB ARCHIVE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES



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ELECTRO-HARMONIX

Ripped Speaker and Nano Deluxe Memory Man

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

TWO NEW EHX pedals arrived recently, one modern and the other a modern take on one of the company's greatest pedals of all time. Respectively, the Ripped Speaker fuzz and the Nano Deluxe Memory Man are equally cool in their own way and offer hip features that warrant a deeper look.

RIPPED SPEAKER

Designed to deliver everything from vintage buzz to blistering, shred-metal fuzz, the Ripped Speaker is a four-knob pedal that, along with fuzz, tone and volume controls, has a powerful rip control that adjusts the bias of the circuit to vary the amount of clipping at the top or bottom of the waveform (more on this to come). It's convenient that the pedal can be powered by a battery or external nine-volt DC adapter (not included), and it has a click-on/click-off mechanical true-bypass foot switch and a small red LED that doesn't blind you when you kick it on. A glass-epoxy PCB grips the components, which you can see in all their glory by removing the bottom plate.

Tested with a Gibson '59 Historic Les Paul and a Reverend Gristlemaster T-styler (both through either a Fender Deluxe Reverb or a '66 Vibro-Champ), the Ripped Speaker easily made its case for being a great all-rounder that can deliver everything from soft, fuzzy distortion (like a loose or faulty tube — or torn speaker — might make) to '60s-style buzz (think "Spirit in the Sky") to chonking, modern grind.

The aforementioned rip knob is a powerful function that assists in dialing in anything from the heaviest tones to the sickest "dying transistor" hash. With the knob set between 11 o' clock and noon, it delivers the smoothest and least compressed response — i.e, the go-to for jacked-up blues or hard rock. Turn it in either direction and the tones descend into gated and spitty-sounding timbres that are more sound-effecty and fun in their own way.

By setting the fuzz knob low, keeping tone around noon and working the guitar volume, you can elicit tones that sound like a small, cranked-up tube amp. The pedal cleans up well when the guitar is turned down, making it possible to get sweet and slightly gritty clean tones that are so expressive and sensitive to picking dynamics. Turning up the fuzz control brings on increasing amounts of saturation that can be steered into searing lead or thick, bottom heaviness, depending on how you set the tone control and how hard the Ripped Speaker is driving the amp with its abundant output. Armed with a wealth of fuzz flavors, the Ripped Speaker qualifies as a do-it-all fuzz that comes at a surprisingly low price for all it does.

SPECIFICATIONS

Ripped Speaker
CONTACT ehx.com
PRICE $110 street

CONTROLS Fuzz, rip, tone volume
FOOT SWITCHES Mechanical. true-bypass
POWER SUPPLY 9VDC (adapter not included). Also operates on battery power
EXTRAS Rip control adds versatility
BUILT USA

KUDOS A wide range of fuzz tones. Effective Rip control. Operates on 9VDC battery or adapter
CONCERNS None

SPECIFICATIONS

Nano Deluxe Memory Man
CONTACT ehx.com
PRICE $203 street

CONTROLS Blend, feedback, delay, level, rate and depth
FOOT SWITCHES Mechanical, true-bypass (buffered bypass selectable with internal switch)
POWER SUPPLY 9VDC external power only
EXTRAS Extra control over modulation via the Rate knob. Handy level control. Internal switch for true bypass or "tails." 9VDC adapter included
BUILT USA

KUDOS Rich, clear analog sound and very low noise. Rate control for the modulation
CONCERNS The six knobs feel a little cramped on the small enclosure

NANO DELUXE MEMORY MAN

Introduced in 1978, the Deluxe Memory Man delivered rich, clear tones that made it a hit with musicians and set a standard for analog delay that endures to this day. The Nano DMM is the latest version of this classic, and, along with a compact housing, it now includes a rate control for the modulation and an internal switch located on the foot-switch board for selecting true bypass (the default stock setting) or buffered bypass, which preserves the delay tails when the effect is switched off.

The unit has blend, feedback, delay, level, rate and depth controls, a pair of LEDs for status and overload, a front-mounted jack for the nine-volt DC power input, and side-mounted input and output jacks.

Plugged into a Fender Deluxe Reverb or a Victoria Double Deluxe 2x12 combo, the Nano DMM proved itself an excellent delay that sounds lush and crystal clear at settings ranging from slapback echo to long ambient delays. Even the repeats stay very clear when the feedback knob is turned up to around four o' clock, where the echoes start drifting into self-oscillation. The noise level is also practically nil at high delay/feedback settings, which is very cool.

The addition of the rate control is a great feature that allows you to adjust the modulation for everything from tape-like wobble to shimmering vibrato. Delay always sounds better with some modulation, and now you can dial in the speed for exactly the modulation and feel that works best for you. In addition, the level knob lets you set the perfect volume for when the effect is activated.

The Electro-Harmonix Nano Deluxe Memory Man brings a new level of enjoyment to this classic effect, and it's a must-have for anyone who thrives on the lush, organic vibe of analog echo.

HUGHES & KETTNER

AmpMan Classic Amplifier Pedal

Guitar Player Editors' Pick

TESTED BY DAVE HUNTER

GERMAN GEAR MAKER Hughes & Kettner has long displayed an appreciation for classic tube-derived tones attained via alternative means. Several years ago, the company coupled tubes with solid-state and digital control methods and effects in its TubeMeister and GrandMeister series of über amps. With the Spirit 200 amps of a couple years back, however, H&K's thinking had evolved toward an ongoing appreciation of tube tone generated by the Spirit Tone Generator. Developed by H&K's chief developer Bernd Schneider, this solid-state technology is not modeling as we've come to know it — and, in fact, isn't modeling at all — but a fully analog amplification system engineered to accurately mirror a tube's response to the incoming guitar signal and deliver a similar tone and playing feel.

As embodied in the Black Spirit and Spirit Nano series, those results were impressive. Now H&K has placed the Spirit Tone Generator in its new AmpMan Classic pedal amplifier (the high-gain AmpMan Modern also available). Comprising a two-channel amp in a 10 x 5.5 x 1.5–inch floor unit with impressive functionality, oodles of connectibility and a 50-watt power amp, it puts a lot of versatility under your toes.

For all that it offers, the AmpMan Classic attains its impressive price point mainly by being a WYSIWYG version of H&K's more comprehensive Spirit-loaded offerings, such as the Black Spirit 200 Floor. Rather than the bigger, more expensive Floor's deeply programmable presets, seven foot switches, and several built-in effects, the AmpMan Classic delivers two foot-switchable channels, each with controls for gain, tone, resonance, presence, sagging and volume, with shared master and solo. There are no presets, user patches or effects, but it does have a foot-switchable FX loop, boost and solo, plus many ways to connect the thing up.

Narrow as it is, the AmpMan's back panel is fully loaded with an input, a noise-gate level control, an FX loop send and return, the built-in H&K Red Box cab sim's on/off switch, a line/mic switch, an XLR DI output and an eight-position cab-type selector. There is also a 1/8-inch stereo headphone jack with volume, a 1/8-inch aux input, the power switch, and a power-amp output capable of generating 50 watts into four ohms, 25 watts into eight ohms, 12.5 watts into 16 ohms. Here is where you'll also find the input for the included 24-volt DC power adapter.

Highlights of the design include the resonance control to fine-tune the low end, the sagging control to induce compression-like power-supply lag, and a selectable solo boost level with foot switch, which is extremely handy to help your leads cut through the band. Most importantly — both to H&K and likely to many users — is the emphasis on the fact that this is all strictly analog stuff. While the company doesn't pretend there are tubes inside that narrow perforated window between the knobs and the foot switches, whatever is in there gives off an enticing orange glow that implies it's doing much the same thing.

Using a Fender Telecaster and a Gibson Les Paul, I tested the AmpMan Classic through its headphone output, with its Red Box DI into a recording interface, and via the power-amp output into an open-back 1x12 cab with a Weber Blue Dog Alnico speaker. What I found was an impressive range of useability. Before delving into sounds, though, a little semantics: Given its straightforward, amp-like control layout, the AmpMan is very easy to use, but the biggest hurdle comes from H&K's labeling of the knobs. In use, resonance and presence play more like traditional bass and treble controls, respectively, while the tone knob on each channel doesn't dial in highs as you'd expect but, in H&K's own words, "sweeps from British to Californian flavor."

As for the sagging control, it might be the most easily misunderstood of them all.

SPECIFICATIONS

AmpMan Classic Amplifier Pedal
CONTACT hughes-and-kettner.com
PRICE $399 street

CHANNELS 2
CONTROLS Gain, tone, resonance, presence, sagging and volume on each channel. Shared master and solo controls. Foot-switches for channel A/B, boost, FX loop, and solo. Noise gate level; RedBox DI on/off switch, mic/line switch, XLR out, and eight-position rotary cab-selector; headphone volume, and power switch on back panel
POWER 50 watts into 4Ω, 25 watts into 8Ω, 12.5 watts into 16Ω
EXTRAS Noise gate, FX loop, built-in RedBox cab sim, aux in, headphone out
WEIGHT 7.8 lbs
BUILT Assembled in China

KUDOS A lot of amp-like tone and flexibility in a portable and reasonably priced package
CONCERNS Several controls don't function quite as their labels suggest and require some hands-on experience to understand

Whereas sag is the slight compression induced by an amp's tubes and power supply at high volumes (a generally subtle effect that is felt more than heard), the sagging control takes the AmpMan Classic's response from tight and dull to loose, raw and rather ragged. While these are all useful controls, you'll want to play with them a while to come to a full understanding of their functions and find your own sweet spots.

Once you do, the AmpMan Classic has a lot to offer for its price. I was immediately impressed with the clean tones on channel A, which segue into tasty, dynamic edge-of-breakup textures with the gain control advanced. The tone control takes them from Vox to black-panel Fender, all arguably the equal of many mid-level tube amps. Channel B provides very playable crunch and lead tones and can achieve some really likeable renditions of both American and British pushed-amp overdrive with some careful application of the sagging control. Crank it with gain pushed up high, and things will get fizzy and fall apart, but there's a broad range of voices in here before it all goes crazy.

The AmpMan Classic interacted well with a handful of overdrive pedals in front, and it handled common tremolo, delay and reverb pedals in its loop without issue. All in all, it really did sound and feel impressively tube-like too, although arguably more so into the headphones or DI'd into studio monitors, where it's all taken a step away from our "amp in the room" expectations. The built-in power amp sounded very good into the 1x12 extension cab with traditional guitar speakers, but it also gave me the impression of a tube preamp into a solid-state output stage, which is kind of what the pedal is emulating anyway, given that the Spirit Tone Generator isn't applied to the unit's power amp. The 25 watts it delivered into the cab's eight-ohm load provided enough oomph to hang with a drummer in a small club or rehearsal space, although not with the decibels I've achieved from many tube amps with similar ratings, or even somewhat less. That said, it sounded very good, and it sure is a handy compact fly rig or easy-loading solution for gigs and rehearsals. Add it all up and it's a ton of power, versatility and usability for the money, and it deserves an Editors' Pick Award.

SHURE

MV7 Podcast Microphone

TESTED BY JIMMY LESLIE

EVERY MUSICIAN NEEDS at least one good mic, and the more flexible it is, the better. Shure's hybrid USB/XLR MV7 checks a ton of boxes, but musicians might overlook a unit with "Podcast Microphone" written right on the box. That would be an unfortunate oversight considering the versatility of this powerful digital/analog tool. The MV7 can act as its own interface when connected directly to a computer or iOS device, triggering an impressive modern feature set that's controllable both on the mic and with expanded features via the ShurePlus Motiv desk-top app. The MV7 can also be used traditionally and was designed with a nod to a Shure icon, the legendary SM7.

The SM7 sounds more refined than the company's ubiquitous SM57, yet it's not as fragile and expensive as a fancy condenser microphone. That makes the close-proximity cardioid classic a desert-island mic for many an engineer, including Travis Kasperbauer at Lucky Recording Company in Brisbane, California, where the Go-Go's recorded their 2020 comeback single, "Club Zero." I planned to take the MV7 there for a full complement of comparisons, but that wasn't going to matter as much if the MV7 couldn't cut it as a standard live vocal mic, so testing began by running it via XLR into an L.R. Baggs Synapse Personal P.A. for a rehearsal and gig.

The MV7's strong, high-mid-focused tone was immediately apparent simply by speaking into it, which, of course, is a huge part of the design goal. It's an excellent tone for podcasting, and singing into it feels a bit different, as that presence really cuts through a mix. I left the foam windscreen on, because, even though it's not particularly hardy — which it should be, considering the design intention — it rounds off a bit of the harsh edges and mitigates some of the low plosives. On a throw-and-go gig, the vocal was clear and present, and I never had to request any EQ or volume adjustments over the course of two sets. Having passed initiation, the mic was ready to hit the studio.

Kasperbauer engineered a session where I sang and played a Martin Grand J16E 12-String [*see review in* GP *January 2021*] into the MV7, a 1970s SM7 and a run-of-the-mill SM57. The MV7's strong signal sounded fine as an acoustic guitar mic, but not surprisingly it wasn't nearly as smooth, full and harmonically sophisticated as the vintage SM7. The tone was far more similar to the SM57, but the MV7 was less polished and brighter on the high side, and darker and

The touch-panel interface lets you perform a wealth of functions without even opening the free ShurePlus Motiv app.

SPECIFICATIONS

MV7 Podcast Microphone
CONTACT shure.com
PRICE $219 street

FEATURES Dynamic mic with 50Hz to 16kHz frequency range and highly directional cardioid pattern that isolates voice and removes unwanted background noise. Hybrid analog (traditional) or digital functionality with onboard and computer controllability
CONTROLS Touch-panel interface. Mute on/off. Tap microphone/headphone to toggle between mic gain and headphone volume; hold to access monitor mix; slide finger to adjust levels, indicated by LEDs (green for gain, orange for phones, green and orange for monitor mix blend). Hold both toggle buttons to lock/unlock touch panel
EXTRAS Free ShurePlus Motiv app (desk-top or iOS) accesses auto-level mode that automatically adjusts gain and offers options for mic position and global tone. Manual mode expands mic control settings, plus switchable EQ filters, limiter, compressor and LED behavior, live meters and Night mode. Savable as custom user presets
CONNECTIONS Micro-USB out to USB-A or C, XLR out, headphone mini jack
COMPATIBLITY Compatible with Windows and Mac plus iOS and Android devices with applicable cables, not provided.
BUILT China

KUDOS Innovative hybrid XLR/USB design with easy operation. Most impressive as an interface with expanded controls via free app
CONCERNS Lightning cable not included. Pop filter insubstantial. No case. Micro-B USB out is a longterm-durability and future compatibility concern. Noncompatible with latest Apple machines, M1 and iPad Pro

colder in the low end. Vocal test results were similar. At Lucky, where everything ran through a vintage API mixing board, the MV7 didn't compare favorably to its traditional Shure cousins. But that's where those mics stop and the MV7 starts to shine.

The MV7's base has connections for the XLR, USB and 1/8-inch headphone outputs.

Plug the USB cable directly into the computer — in this case an Apple Mac Pro running High Sierra 10.13.6 — and the MV7 comes alive and alight. The conical mic base now acts as an interface, complete with a headphone jack for direct monitoring. The digital display panel lights up, and control is significantly expanded upon downloading the free ShurePlus Motiv app (see specs sidebar for a list of its functions). The main takeaway is that you can make basic gain and monitor level changes using the trackpad on the mic, with the row of LEDs acting as an indicator. Pushing the auto level button puts the mic on autopilot, which is fine when talking or taking a very consistent approach to singing or playing relatively softly. For our trial song, Boston's "More Than a Feeling," auto level worked well for the softer verse guitar and vocals, but we could hear the limiter and compressor working hard to attenuate the gain on the significantly higher chorus dynamic. That's when we used the app to go into manual mode and find a happy medium for the gain and implement other options, including a high-pass filter, limiter and medium compression setting. It was also fun to turn on live metering and monitor the input level right on the mic itself.

The most important takeaway is that the USB tone was on par with the XLR tone. And while going digital will sacrifice what you gain from a high-end analog preamp, you can compensate for this using the onboard controls, the Motiv app and/or other plug-ins applied "in the box."

The rugged all-metal Shure MV7 is an innovative analog/digital hybrid that's ideal for guitarists who are looking to keep their travel gear to a minimum, up their live-streaming game or enter the podcasting arena. For those seeking a mic suitable for modern digital applications in addition to being quite serviceable for vocals or guitar in the analog realm, this is an impressive jack of all trades.

EARTHQUAKER DEVICES

Hizumitas Fuzz Sustainer

TESTED BY ART THOMPSON

A VINTAGE JAPANESE Elk BM Sustainar pedal has been the source of the bombastic tone that guitarist Wata gets in the experi-metal band, Boris!, and the new Hizumitas pedal is the result of Earthquaker's efforts to re-create it. The story goes that after testing different versions of the Elk BM and finding — no surprise — that they all sounded different, Earthquaker's designers realized the only way to reproduce the tones that Wata wields was to get their hands on her actual pedal. Amazingly, she sent it to them to evaluate, and they discovered that it indeed possessed a special circuit that produced heavy saturation and had a gritty edge and massive bottom. Yet it also had a clear and dynamic presentation, with plenty of mids and top-end bite.

Our review model has a silvery metal enclosure emblazoned with purple jackalopes and lightning bolts, like a coat of arms. The compact pedal has sustain, tone and volume controls, top-mounted jacks and a bypass foot switch that is relay controlled and requires nine volts DC to operate. The circuitry is laid out on a glass-epoxy PCB, and it's nice that you can see the components when the bottom plate is removed. However, battery power is not an option with this pedal, nor is an adapter provided.

Plugged into a Fender Deluxe Reverb and a '66 Vibro-Champ for studio playing — and pummeled with a Epiphone Lazarus Les Paul and a Reverend Gristlemaster T-style guitar — the Hizumitas churned out gritty distortion tones, with gobs of singing sustain available via the knob marked "S". The tone control delivers everything from huge low end when turned clockwise to skinnier textures when spun the opposite direction. Setting the knob around two o' clock produced a killer tone with rich midrange color and a clear, articulate top end. Small control adjustments let you home in on slim single-coils or meaty humbuckers, and the pedal is dynamically responsive and cleans up quite well when you lighten up on the attack and/or turn down the guitar volume. It also has a lot of output so you can easily overdrive amps or pedals and get that combination of juice from the Hizumitas and whatever it's driving into.

A superb grind machine that walks the line between distortion and fuzz, the Hizumitas is a Godzilla for heavy styles, although it can be deployed for pretty much anything where beefy, dynamic crunch is the order. Well done!

SPECIFICATIONS

Earthquaker Hizumitas Fuzz Sustainer
CONTACT earthquakerdevices.com
PRICE $149

CONTROLS Volume, tone, sustain
FOOT SWITCHES Relay based true-bypass
POWER SUPPLY 9VDC (adapter not included)
BUILT USA

KUDOS Delivers crushing grind and massive low end
CONCERNS No provision for battery power

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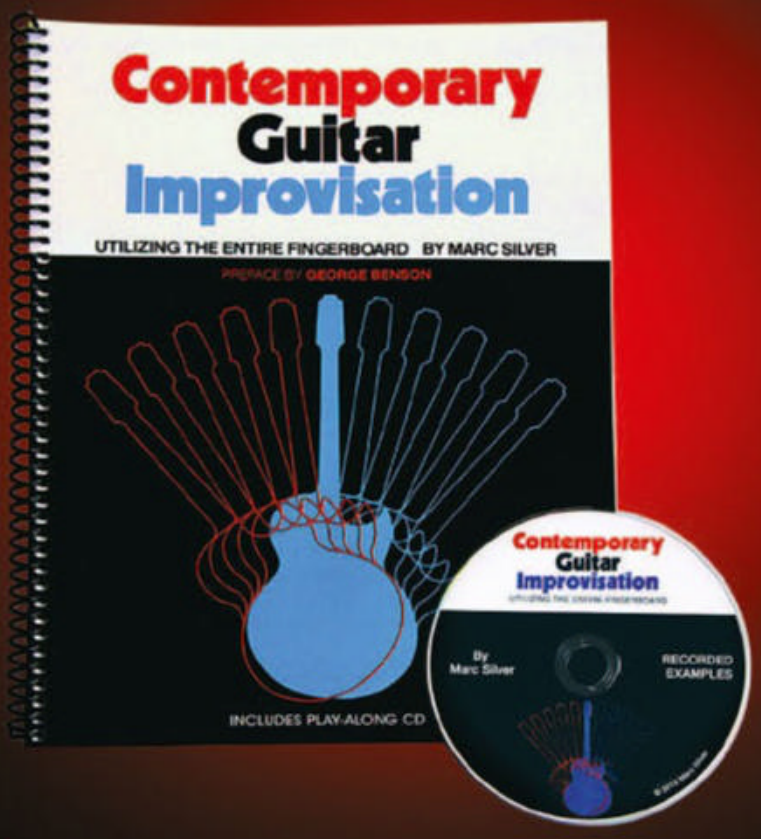

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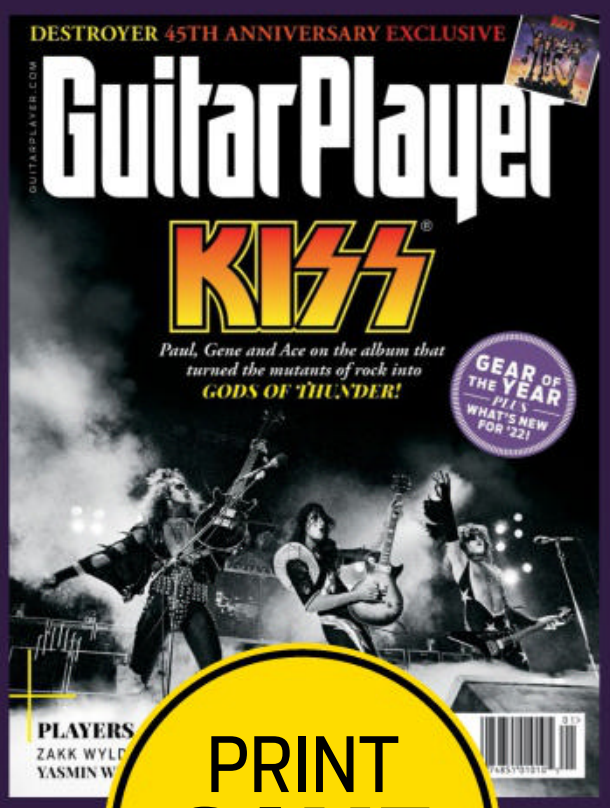

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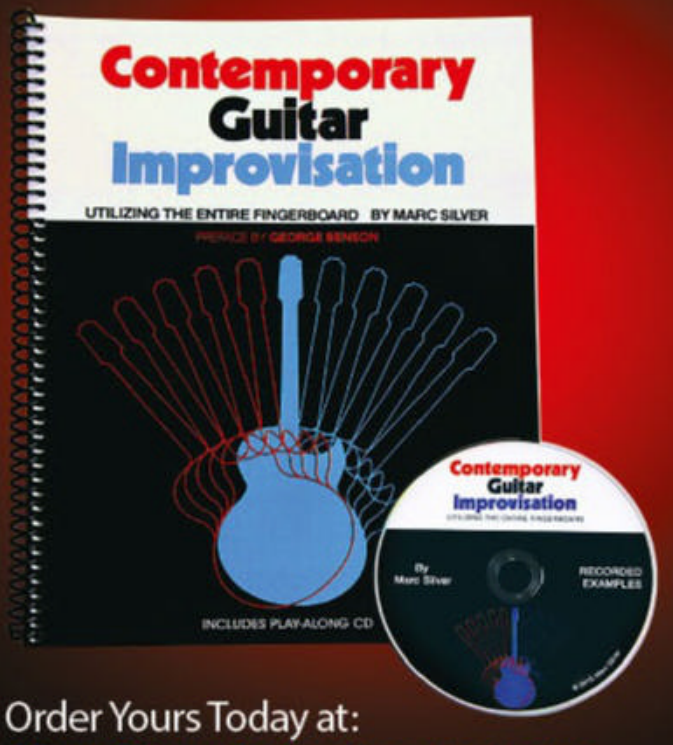

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How I Wrote...

"Runaway Train"

Dave Pirner reveals the roots of Soul Asylum's unstoppable hit.

BY JOE BOSSO

Dave Pirner (left) and Dan Murphy perform in the late 1990s

"OF ALL THE songs I've written, this one sure has legs," singer-guitarist Dave Pirner says about "Runaway Train," the 1992 lush rock ballad that briefly turned his cult-favorite alternative punk band, Soul Asylum, into multi-Platinum stars. "It's hard to understand why one song out of hundreds that I've written still gets played on the radio so much," he says. "But to a lot of people, it's a special song, so it's not for me to have a say in the matter. The song belongs to everybody."

SOUL SEARCH

By the end of the 1980s, Soul Asylum were facing difficult times. Having released a string of critically hailed indie albums, they signed with A&M Records and issued three discs that failed to sell. To make matters worse, Pirner was suffering from hearing issues, and the band (which also included guitarist Dan Murphy, bassist Karl Mueller and drummer Grant Young) considered breaking up. "Things were really hard," Pirner says. "I thought I was going deaf, so I withdrew from playing loud electric music and started writing on the acoustic guitar. It turned out to be a pivotal move for both me and the band, and things began to improve on all fronts."

Around this time, Pirner kept coming back to a song idea that wouldn't let go. "It was based around the words 'two souls,'" he remembers. "'Two souls laughing at the crazy rain.' I was writing about myself and what I now know was undiagnosed depression. It took me a while to get the whole thing down. I kept strumming and strumming, and then I connected the lyrics to the runaway train concept. After that, I pretty much wrote it all on a napkin."

While shopping for a new record deal, Soul Aslyum played a few low-key gigs at which they performed "Runaway Train." "I could see a reaction from people when we played it," Pirner says. A cassette of their new demos made the rounds at labels, and Pirner recalls executives saying, "You're supposed to be a punk band. Why are you making this 'down' music?" Columbia Records, however, recognized the hit potential and maturity in the new songs and signed the group to a multi-album deal.

HITTING THEIR STRIDE

Once in the studio with producer Michael Beinhorn (riding high after helming the Red Hot Chili Peppers' *Mother's Milk*), Soul Asylum hit more snags: Grant Young was sidelined in favor of session ace Sterling Campbell, and the band had difficulty channeling its punk-rock energy into Pirner's acoustic-based songs. "It took a while to hit our stride again," the guitarist says. "We wasted a lot of money in studio time."

"Runaway Train" took multiple takes to get right, but as Pirner notes, somewhat ironically, the rousing, richly textured version on the album *Grave Dancer's Union* remained almost "100 percent true" to his original demo. "The big difference was my guitar sound," he says. "In the studio, I rented this beautiful Gibson J-200. It sounded amazing. I still play that guitar to this day."

RUNAWAY HIT

Released as the third single from *Grave Dancer's Union*, "Runaway Train" raced to number five on the *Billboard* Hot 100, and its emotionally charged video that focused on missing children seized the public's attention. "I can't overstate the power of the video," Pirner says. "A lot of missing kids were found because of it, so to have played a part in that, it's beyond amazing. I met a couple of those kids and their parents at shows. What a unique experience."

The song's success caught Pirner by surprise — "I thought it sounded good, but I never knew it would be a hit," he says — and he was conflicted when it won a 1994 Grammy for Best Rock Song. "The idea that they give you an award for writing a song seemed very strange to me," he says.

"THE EXECS SAID, YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE A PUNK BAND. WHY ARE YOU MAKING THIS 'DOWN' MUSIC?"

For a few years, he refrained from playing "Runaway Train" at shows but eventually put it back in the band's setlist after. "Everybody was mad at me," he says of the omission. "I had people come up and say, 'We traveled miles to see the show, and we really wanted to hear that song. My kid wanted to hear it. My wife wanted to hear it. Why aren't you playing it?' After a while, I was like, 'Okay, I get it. Everybody wants it, it goes back in.'"

PATRICK FORD/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

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SansAmp Classic (1989)

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SansAmp Bass Driver DI (1994)

Often unseen, it's hardly a secret that the SansAmp Bass Driver is the secret weapon behind mammoth rigs on arena stages around the globe. It is also widely recognized as a studio staple for virtually every genre, and will make any FOH engineer smile.

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